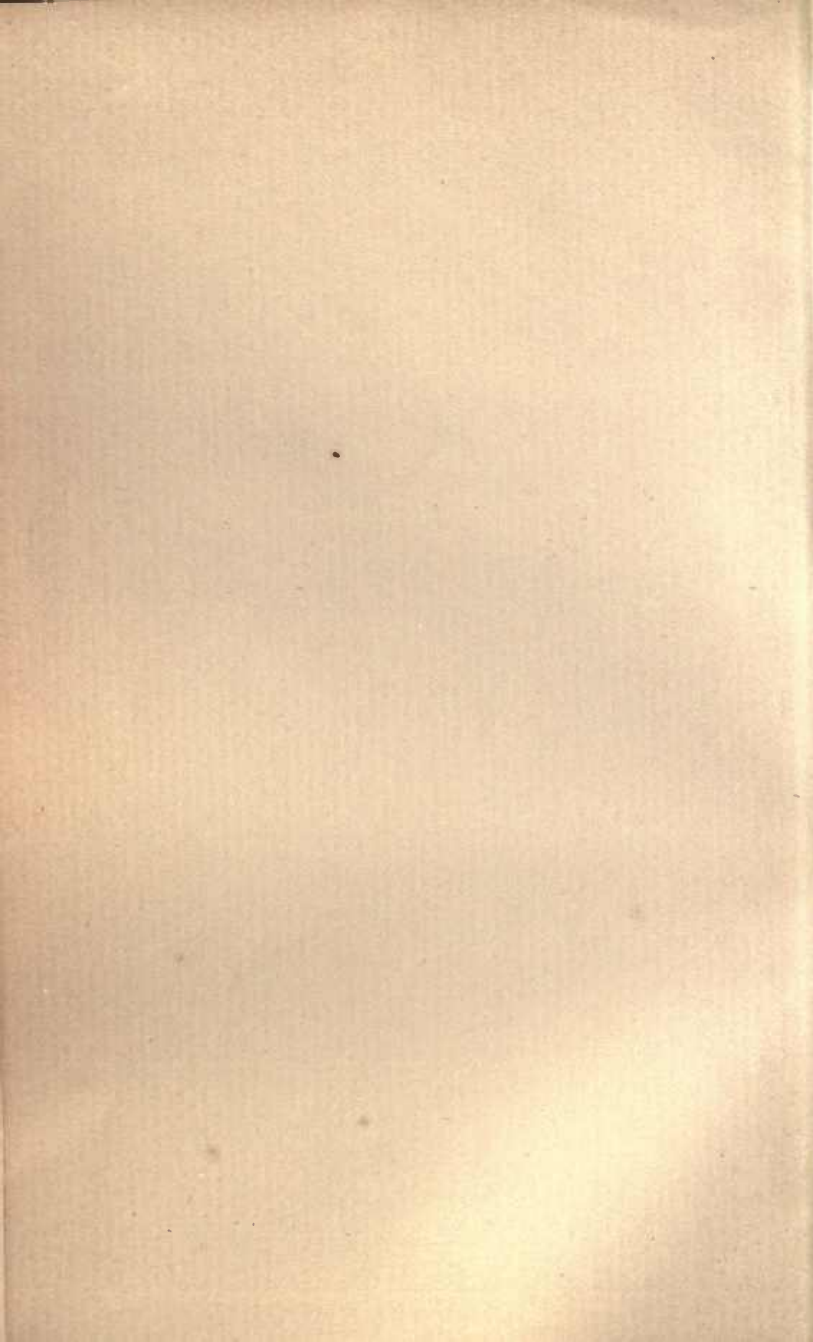


PACTOLUS
PRIME

by
Albion
W.
Tourgée

104 100



UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY, LOS ANGELES

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

PACTOLUS PRIME

JUDGE TOURGÉE'S BOOKS.

The following list of the works of the distinguished author of **Pactolus Prime**, with the date of publication of each, will be of interest to many thousands of his readers :

A ROYAL GENTLEMAN (first styled TOINETTE), 1874

FIGS AND THISTLES, 1879

A FOOL'S ERRAND, 1879

BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW, 1880

JOHN EAX (and MAMELON), 1882

HOT PLOWSHARES, 1883

AN APPEAL TO CÆSAR, 1884

BLACK ICE, 1885

BUTTON'S INN, 1886

THE VETERAN AND HIS PIPE, 1887

LETTERS TO A KING, 1888

WITH GAUGE & SWALLOW, 1889

PACTOLUS PRIME, 1890

PACTOLUS PRIME

BY

ALBION W. TOURGÉE

AUTHOR OF "A FOOL'S ERRAND," ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK

CASSELL PUBLISHING COMPANY

104 & 106 FOURTH AVENUE

1890 P 359

COPYRIGHT,
1890,
BY O. M. DUNHAM.

All rights reserved.

PRESS W. L. MERSON & CO.,
RAHWAY, N. J.

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

THE works of the author of this volume have probably covered a wider range of types and embraced a greater variety of characters than those of any living American novelist. Steadily refusing to be affected by the craze to be counted a disciple of any particular "school of fiction," he has pursued his own course of depicting men and women as they are,—the creatures of motive and environment. As a result his works are crowded with strongly drawn, life-like types, each one the result of a distinctly traced inheritance and a specific environment, the effects of which are never lost sight of by the reader.

In method he is not only original, but almost unique. He does not develope his characters by self-analytic monologue or the unnatural expedient of making them constant seekers for advice; but he allows his readers to see them in their acts and attendant conversation, and in the reflected life of associated lives. The excellence of this method has been abundantly shown by the peculiarly vivid impressions his works have left on the minds of

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

their readers. No one is able to escape its power ; once begun, one of his stories must be read to the end.

His latest work is a striking exposition of his peculiar qualities as a novelist, and stamps upon the mind a picture which no reader can ever forget. Pactolus Prime is one of those vivid creations of the novelist which will stand out in the history of literature as a type in which the sentiment of an epoch is made incarnate. He is the *Ædipus* of American fiction, not less marked than his classical prototype in the singular pathos of his life, in the patience and hopeless bitterness with which he faces his destiny, and in the exalted philosophy with which he passes by the half-unconscious instruments of his doom, to denounce and defy the impalpable tendencies which impel him and them toward a fate as inexorable as that which the weird sisters meted out to the woful victim of the most thrilling of the Greek tragedies.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AN ADVENT MORN, - - - - -	1
II. A CROWDED INN, - - - - -	5
III. A PROFESSOR OF THE BLACK ART, - - -	20
IV. MASTER AND DISCIPLE, - - - - -	33
V. WHAT THE HERALD-ANGELS SAW, - - -	51
VI. AN ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGES, - - -	70
VII. SOME EXPERT TESTIMONY, - - - - -	81
VIII. COUNTERCLAIM AND SET-OFF, - - -	93
IX. "IF WISHES WERE FISHES," - - - - -	100
X. A BASIS OF COMPOSITION, - - - - -	108
XI. THE FEET OF TWO ADMINISTRATIONS, -	131
XII. AN UNSATISFACTORY CLIENT, - - -	144
XIII. A PUZZLED COUNSELLOR, - - - - -	157
XIV. PROFESSIONAL COURTESY, - - - - -	175
XV. BAFFLED ENTERPRISE, - - - - -	181
XVI. AN INTRACTABLE DONEE, - - - - -	192
XVII. THE BOUNDARY OF RIGHT, - - - - -	211
XVIII. AN UNEXPECTED CALL, - - - - -	219

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. A PROMISE FULFILLED, - - - -	229
XX. THE FIAT OF SCIENCE, - - - -	236
XXI. "AND FATE AT LENGTH WAS KIND," -	256
XXII. THE RETURN OF PROCESS, - - -	268
XXIII. THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING DEAD, - -	284
XXIV. A TRUE RECORD, - - - - -	290
XXV. "BLOOD WILL TELL," - - - -	324
XXVI. THE LAW OF PROGRESS, - - - -	330
XXVII. WHAT IT IS TO BE A HERO, - - -	347
XXVIII. PENALTIES, - - - - -	353

PACTOLUS PRIME.

I.

AN ADVENT MORN.

IT was Christmas morning in Washington. The eastern sky was just light enough to show the dark outlines of the Capitol standing out against it. A driving wind swept clouds of dust and billows of fine, hard-frozen snow along the Avenue, heaping its curiously mingled burden for a moment in the sheltering door-way and then sucking it out with some queer freak of changeful purpose and racing to the nearest crossing, as if to hide it from the swift pursuing gust. The signs and shutters creaked and slammed. The streets were deserted, save here and there some lonely figure half-walked, half-trotted before the gale, or with bowed head waveringly faced its force. The long rows of lamps shimmered coldly in the distance, while on the wide Avenues the electric lights glared down hissing and flickering in their uncanny radiance, covering the dark, wind-swept pavement with strange, unreal shadows.

The festivities of Christmas Eve had ceased ; they had been too furious to last. The denizens of the city slept ; some pillowed on pleasant memories, some happily oblivious of evil deeds, and all expectantly dreaming of tomorrow's joys. The bells of St. Aloysius had sounded at midnight the Annunciation chimes ; the sleepers had waked to smile ; the revelers had paused to approve. The Advent morn had come to the Christian capital of a Christian nation, bringing a thrill of complacent joy to the hearts of a Christian people, sincerely grateful that they are "not as other men."

The masses who rule and the officials who serve slept in peace. No enemy thundered at the gates ; no traitor plotted within the walls ; no peril threatened the Republic. Freedom held its court beside the broad Potomac. Prosperity filled all the land ! Well might the nation rejoice and the denizens of the metropolis rest in peace ! The hour marked the flood-tide of contentment in the happy homes of a favored nation. Founded in justice, it had gathered rich harvests of "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." Its bursting garner and overflowing treasury demonstrated how "righteousness exalteth a nation," and its happy people pitied the luckless dwellers in

unfortunate lands where lean exchequers and impoverished homes attest that "sin is a disgrace to any people." No wonder they pitied "the heathen Turk," and all of "those who sit in darkness," on which the star of Bethlehem hath not shone. Embosomed in righteousness lay the capital city of that nation which is the consummate flower of the ripening perfections of the nineteenth century of the Christ-Child's blissful reign!

Even vice was silent and crime was still as the blessed dawn approached, for vice was palsied by anticipatory revels, and crime had destroyed its potency for evil by the fervor of its joy at the approach of the holy festival. The halls of legislation were silent. The Lobby rested. The White House door was shut. The Departments were deserted. The gambling-hells were closed. The saloons were dark. Only carved heroes and invisible policemen watched over the slumbering city. They and the angels, of course—the herald angels who sang above Judea's hills so many centuries ago, who certainly would not miss an opportunity to witness the fruition of the message which they brought, "Peace on earth; good will among men." They naturally lingered above the capital city of the most Christian nation of the most enlightened epoch of the

Christian era, to note the fulfillment of prophecy—the influence of that transforming thought,

The Holiest brought to earth and set,
Before a wondering world on Olivet !

How they were pleased with what they beheld it would not beseem mortal to inquire. What they saw, if they waited until the gray, cold dawn, that alone we may presume to tell. And this, in truth, is all that can be of serious interest to the world of to-day. Angelic opinions are at a discount in this age. Even what our neighbor thinks is of far less consequence to us than what he does. What he thinks concerns himself alone; what he does touches us as well. We pity his woes—pity is very cheap—and show our “good will” thereby on each recurrent anniversary of the Christ-Child’s birth. We cannot watch all our neighbors, or tell what all of them did on the “blessed day” of which we write; but what some of them were doing that Christmas morning, “before it was yet day,” these pages will reveal.

II.

A CROWDED INN.

IT is the habit of inns to be full at Christmas time,—a habit of long standing, it would seem, for there was no place for the mother of our Lord in the one at Bethlehem, some nineteen centuries ago. The inns of Washington are no exception to this general rule. Despite the customary legislative recess, the great caravanseries of the national capital are sure to be crowded to overflowing at this season. The guests begin the Christmas festivities early the day before, fearful, no doubt, that they may miss some of the exhilarating influences of this holy festival. As Christmas Eve closes in, the tide of life that throngs the great rotunda, surges along the tessellated halls, crowds the spacious bar and chatters, roars, and lounges in the capacious waiting-rooms, is almost unprecedented in any other city of the land. But the exhilaration is too keen to last. By and by the ebb sets in; the callers depart; the bar is closed; the absent guests return. Finally the last roysterer is

“steered” to the safe harbor of his room, and the last “dead-beat” unwillingly persuaded to abandon the kindly warmth of its corridors and the slumberous comfort of its chairs. Then the lights are turned down and guests and servants enjoy a brief period of repose. Only the clerk, a bell-boy or two, and the night-watchmen are alert of all the mass of slumbering life that fills its crowded rooms.

Naturally enough, Christendom sleeps late on Christmas morn, and nowhere wakes more unwillingly than in the capital of the Republic. Not only the night’s festivities, but some lingering relics of the slave’s saturnalia have served to abbreviate the hours of slumber. The “Best House”—named after its proprietor, though the term was punningly applied to its quality also,—was still silent, therefore, its windows darkened and its corridors empty, in the early morning, while the storm raged without. The clerk had abandoned the circular inclosure, the counter surrounding which was piled high with Christmas gifts, and reclining in an easy-chair with his legs resting on another so as to expose the soles of his feet to the grateful warmth of a corrugated steam-heater, slumbered peacefully. A single hall-boy dozed upon the hard seat allotted to the strong-legged Mercurys of the modern hotel service,

who, lacking wings, and forbidden to use the elevator, illustrate, to the waiting guests' frequent discomfiture, the mechanical axiom, that "what is gained in power is lost is time." He slept leaning uncomfortably over the iron elbow-rests which prevented him from lying down, and were intended to keep him awake. Sitting bolt upright before the counter on which lay the open register wherein the names of guests were entered, snored the night-watchman. He had evidently made a hard fight to keep awake. With legs spread wide apart and hands grasping firmly the arms of the chair, he seemed even yet to bid defiance to the slumberous tendency, save that his head, slightly tipped backward, rested just at its base against the edge of the marble counter which bounds the clerk's domain, and the traitorous trumpet of his nose gave evidence of his unconditional surrender. The hands of the clock pointed to a quarter of five. The lights were low and few, and the spacious office was in uncertain shadow. The great hostelry seemed almost deserted.

The storm-door opened and closed with a dull thud. There was a rustling of garments, a scraping of feet on the woven-wire mat, and the great inner door swung noiselessly back, admitting a gust of cold air and a man

wearing a long overcoat, cut in the fashion of a private soldier's, but of a dull brown color, and a worn silk hat, the brim of which was full of particles of snow. The automatic portal closed slowly after him with its accustomed pneumatic sigh. The new-comer paused as if to recover breath after his struggle with the storm without; rubbed his hands together briskly for a moment, hanging the crook of a heavy cane over his arm in order to do so, undid the mufflings about his neck and walked slowly toward the desk. A pair of spectacles, with very large glasses and heavy bows, was all that relieved a face of singularly uniform darkness. He appeared to take in the situation at a glance, and smiled to think that those whom so many trusted to guard their slumbers were themselves asleep. He was evidently on familiar ground. Advancing cautiously, with a curious shuffling gait, he touched the slumbering watchman's shoulder and said in a low whisper:

"Isn't it time you called the girls, Mike!"

"Troth, it's right ye are," answered the watchman in the same guarded tone, springing to his feet as he spoke, "an' it's a thrate I'm owin' ye, Mither Prime, fer savin' me a dollar an' beloike a ratin' too, if the clerk had caught me nappin'. Lucky I'm in toime to make up

the riccord, too—it's not foive yet, an' it's always four till it's foive, ye know."

He went inside the circular inclosure and touched the spring of the time-clock, the punctured dial of which was the guaranty that some time within the hour he had been awake, and then stole off on tiptoe to perform his duty of waking the other servants. The little stir thus caused roused the clerk, whose slumber, accustomed to interruptions, was of the lightest.

"Mike!" he called, sleepily. The newcomer waited until the watchman had disappeared down the dim-lighted hall, and then answered :

"Mike is not here, Mr. Carson : it's likely he has gone to call the scrubbers."

"Is it as late as that, Prime?" exclaimed the clerk, throwing off his drowsiness, sitting up in his chair and taking his feet off the other. "I must have overslept myself, and I guess Mike has been asleep, too!"

"I am a little early," was the evasive answer, as the other shuffled along until he stood before the sleepy clerk. "Mike has probably been looking after the fires ; it's mighty comfortable here."

He pressed his hands upon the heater and coughed and shivered as he spoke.

"And, pretty rough outside, I reckon," commented the clerk, glancing at the other's hat.

"Cold and blowing," replied Prime, taking off his hat and shaking the round, hard pellets out on the stone floor. "Everything's a-flying, and the sleet stings like shot."

The man rubbed his face as he spoke as if to remove the sensations he described.

"A bad day for Christmas," said the clerk. "By the way, 'Merry Christmas!' to you, Prime."

"Thank ye, sir," said the other, bowing constrainedly. "I hope you'll have a pleasant time."

"Of course I shall," was the hearty answer. "Don't you expect the same?"

"Christmas is jes' ez good as any other day ter me, Mr. Ca'son," said the other carelessly, with a touch of the negro dialect, not before noticeable in his speech.

"As good as any other day! Oh, I say, Prime, a fellow isn't half-white unless he has a better time Christmas than any other day in the year." The clerk stretched and yawned, rubbing his eyes with his hand and bending his slender body backward with the healthy abandon of half-awakened youth as he spoke.

"Perhaps that's the réason I don't expect it," said the other grimly. He wore a black knitted

cap underneath his hat, covering his forehead almost to the brims of his glasses. Not so much as the white of an eye was visible as he turned a sharp, hard face toward the young man.

"Don't be so touchy, Prime; I didn't mean that, of course," said the clerk apologetically. "Though a nigger gets his share of Christmas all the same. 'No distinction of race, color or previous condition' about that institution. The only trouble is that he isn't satisfied with one day; he wants a week of Christmases at a stretch. Eh, Prime?" He laughed lightly at his own jest as he stepped across to wake the sleeping hall-boy.

"If he had a year at a time he wouldn't any more'n catch up, would he?" asked Prime in a tone that seemed to stop just short of a sneer.

"Well, I don't know; I guess the nigger's always had his share of whatever good times there were going."

"Oh, of course, he's had his *sheer*,"—said the other, with a thin, derisive laugh—"his sheer! That's certainly good, Mr. Ca'son! *His* sheer!"

Again the negro dialect betrayed itself more strongly than before, seeming strangely incongruous with the low, even tone and now unmistakable sneer, while a row of white teeth showed between the dark lips with almost

startling ghastliness, as he continued, almost hissing out the words:

"There's one little difficulty 'bout it. Who decided what *was* his sheer? Who measured it out to him? How did it come to *be* his sheer? How did he *git* it?"

"Oh, I can't tell," laughed the clerk, "stole it most likely. That's the way a nigger usually gets what he's too lazy to work for. Come, be lively there!" he added, turning to the scrubbing-women who had just entered at the other side of the room with buckets and brushes. "Be lively! You're a half-hour late and people are bound to be stirring early to-day. Turn on the lights there, Mike, and move the chairs out of the way!"

He spoke good-naturedly, and hummed a Christmas hymn as he turned to his desk while the row of wrinkled women with dresses pinned up at the sides, showing coarse, dirty petticoats and heavy shoes, fell upon their knees and began to scrub and wipe the alternate black and white squares of the polished stone floor. They backed away from their work as it progressed, with a queer, sidling motion necessary to prevent their nether limbs from slipping beyond the sheltering skirts.

Prime still stood by the heater warming himself. The clerk sauntered back and stood

beside it also, his hands clasped behind him while he watched the line of women slowly moving across the floor on their hands and knees.

"They are white!" he said significantly.

"Yes," answered the other absently.

"Not much better off than niggers, are they?"

"Didn't the daughter of one of your scrubbers marry a Senator's son?"

"Why, yes," dubiously.

"She was white, you see—nearly as white as—as my boy—Ben! Now if she had been his sister that would have been wicked, you know—positively wicked, Mr. Ca'son!"

"Pshaw! you must have got out of bed wrong foot first this morning, Prime," said the clerk heartily, laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "this isn't the time to be grouty and ill-tempered. This is Christmas Day, old man!"

"The birthday of the white Christ!" sneered Prime.

"The what?" asked the other curiously.

"The white Christ—the white man's Saviour?"

"Now, Prime, I'm not much on religion, as you know, but I vow that's too bad! You're morbid, man! Get something for your liver as soon as the bar is open, and tell Hank to mark

it down to me. The White Christ! What are you thinking of? White? Not much, I should say! Why, man, wasn't the Saviour born in a stable and cradled in a manger? Don't you remember the old carol we used to sing? How was it?" The clerk hummed the air as if to aid his recollection. "You ought to know it, Prime? I'll lay a hundred to one you've sung it many a Christmas in old Virginia?"

"Neither in old or new Virginny, Mr. Ca'son," said the dusky listener with his quiet sneer. "I may have believed a nigger had some sheer in Christmas when he was a slave, but since he has been free—wal, let them sing Christmas hymns that choose: my voice is too badly cracked."

His chuckling laugh was drowned in the cough that followed.

"Oh, bother your nonsense! You know what I mean," said the clerk. "How did it go? I don't wonder it makes you cough. It's a bit of slashing, open-handed, free-grace and salvation-for-all doctrine that ought to make such a snarling old ne'er-content as you sick for life. Oh, I remember:

"Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining,
Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall;
Angels adore Him in slumber reclining,
Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all."

The young man sang in a full baritone which rolled melodiously through the half-lighted room and dim branching corridors. The women looked up and turned to each other with a pleasant word of greeting.

"Sure, but I'd forgot it was Christmas Day!" said Mike, crossing himself and muttering a hurried prayer.

One of the women turned partially away from the others, straightened up on her knees, and letting her brush fall, whispered a prayer also. Over the others there seemed to steal a tender feeling, but they did not intermit their labors. Some moved their lips, and one or two made the sign of the cross.

"Now what have you got to say to that, you sneering old stick-in-the-mud?" asked the clerk good-humoredly.

"I suppose I should feel the same way about it," said Prime wistfully, "if—if I was a white man!"

He picked up his hat which had dropped on the stone pavement, and putting his left hand in the pocket of his great-coat and leaning on his cane started with his curious dragging gait along the wide hall. The clerk returned to his desk whistling softly the air he had just sung.

"By the way, Prime," he called to the

figure disappearing down the corridor, "I have a package here for you."

"For *me*, Mr. Ca'son?" asked the old man in some surprise, shuffling back to the desk.

"Yes, sir! for you! Santa Claus hasn't forgotten you, even if you do talk so mean about the day we dedicate to him. Ah, here it is," dragging out a large oblong box carefully tied up. "'Pactolus Prime'; that's you, I take it?"

He laid the package on the counter as he spoke, and looked quizzically into the other's face.

"'Pactolus Prime, *Esquire*,'" said the old man, slowly scanning the address and laying a scornful stress upon the title. "That's certainly meant for me, Mr. Ca'son, and by the same token, it don't take much guessin' to tell who the fool is that sent it."

His countenance relaxed, however, as he spoke, and his tone grew softer despite the harsh words he uttered.

"Why, of course not; it was Santa Claus, you old unbeliever!" was the laughing reply.

"May be you're right, Mr. Ca'son," said Prime as he lifted his bundle from the desk, and relapsing into his former sarcastic tone, he repeated: "May be you're right. I've heard that Santa Claus was really some sort of

heathen god just made over to suit later notions. *He* might not be troubled at my complexion—might be color-blind, you know ; but the Christ, Mr. Ca'son, your *white* Christ, don't ever make such mistakes. He may make niggers welcome enough in Heaven, if any of 'em are allowed to git thar, but he ce'tainly hasn't any use for 'em on earth. His followers have a heap to say about 'jestice and mercy'—always puttin' the jestice first ; but when it comes to dealin' with a nigger, they leave the jestice out entirely and expect him to be mighty grateful for *his sheer of what's left!* His sheer of the mercy, you know !”

There was an angry flash under his spectacles as the lame man turned away.

“What an incorrigible old sinner !” said the clerk to himself, as he watched the retreating figure. “With all his queer notions, though, God hasn't made many whiter men than that same Prime—according to my idea, that is, and just for common, every-day use,” he added, as if apologizing to himself for the extravagance of his first assertion.

A bell tinkled, and a white disk upon the indicator dropped out of its place, revealing a numeral beneath.

“Front !” exclaimed the clerk, dropping his hand instinctively upon the call-bell. “Answer

two-forty-five!" he said sharply to the sleepy boy as he touched a button and restored the disk to its place. Hardly had he done so, when the bell sounded again and another disk fell out of place, and almost before he had time to note the number, another and another.

"Now comes the rush," he muttered. "Call the other boys, Mike! Lively now! Every man, woman and child, or child, woman and man rather, in the whole blessed house will ring from one to forty times during the next two hours to inquire for Christmas gifts. That's the sort of Christmas a hotel clerk gets! I'd about as lief be a nigger!"

He pulled a lever under the counter, and a bell clanged harshly in some remote region of the great building. A moment after a porter answered, and the bell-boys came dragging sleepily in one after another.

"Make the five-thirty calls!" said the clerk to the porter, handing him a list. "Look alive now, and make no mistakes!"

"T-r-r-ring! T-r-r-ring!" went the electric bells. Disk after disk fell on the indicator.

"Front! One-sixty-three! Front! Four-forty-eight!"

The boys hurried off one after another, and Christmas had begun in the great hotel. Prime

crept along the corridor and disappeared down a passage to the left, up which came a faint glimmer of light and the sound of running water.

III.

A PROFESSOR OF THE BLACK ART.

PACTOLUS PRIME was the bootblack of the "Best House." Most of the hotels in the national metropolis are "houses" of some sort. The style serves to mark the evolution of the hostel. The inn or tavern became first a "hotel," then a "house," and finally has dropped all descriptive modifiers, and bullies the traveler with the puzzling uncertainty of a name alone. Our grandfathers found "entertainment for man and beast" at the "Wayside Inn"; our fathers at the "Grand Hotel," while the aspiration of our own younger days was to put up in style at the new "Monument House," and we now instruct the cabman, with a bit of cockney flavor in our tone, to drive us to "The Brunswick." The one thing to be thankful for about Washington caravanseries is that they have not yet ceased to be "houses." It sounds provincial, but it implies comfort and a certain amount of liberty. The guest of the hotel which sports a single name, as if it were the one distinctive thing so-named on

earth, is apt to be a prisoner who submits to being bullied at extortionate rates for the honor of inditing his letters on its specially embossed paper.

The Best House needs no description. Everybody knows its character and location. It fronts on two streets and one avenue; is accessible from each; has the most unpretentious of entrances; innumerable tiled corridors; a spacious office; a magnificent dining-room; a bar notable alike for its ornamentation, its service, and the quality of its decoctions; smoking-rooms, billiard-rooms, writing-rooms, and half a thousand sleeping-rooms. Where the army of servants work or lodge or what is the number of them, none knoweth save he who bears the imperial title of "Manager." Him the guests seldom see, but his authority is represented and his dignity suffers no diminution in the person of the "Clerk," who in the category of the modern hotel officials ought more properly to bear the title of "Lord of the Bed-chamber," he having the care, and being responsible for the safety and comfort, of the guest, asleep or awake.

The bootblack's stand was in the basement, adjoining the public wash-room. The "stand" consisted of four chairs placed upon a dais raised a couple of steps above the level of

the floor. There was a pivoted iron foot-rest in front of each of these, and behind them a window, the lower sash of ground glass, the upper one showing a whitewashed area wall with its railed enclosure above. Through this railing one had a glimpse of the street and sidewalk. The pavement sloped backward from the front of the house, pretty sharply, on the side-street. At the upper edge of the window one barely saw the knee of the passer-by; at the lower, the vision extended almost to the middle. Only the faces of dwarfs and children were ever visible. Pactolus Prime loved to watch this queer procession of toe and heel in the intervals of his work. His calling—it was something more than avocation to him—had made him observant of feet, and especially of foot-gear. He noticed the shape, the make of the shoe, the play of the instep, the swing of the leg, and the turn of the ankle with discriminating knowledge. He probably knew more men and women by their feet—or rather by their shoes—than any other man in the country; more indeed than most men know by memory of faces. Most of the accustomed passers-by and all the regular patrons of his stand he knew by name. Many a man would have gone another way had he known that observant eyes rested on his boots as he strode

by Prime's window, and many a lady would have blushed had she known that her feet were recognized by one who had never seen her face.

Pactolus Prime had occupied this "stand" twelve years. Every guest of the great hotel knew him, and many more, for he had blacked boots somewhere in the city, years before he became a feature of the Best House—just how many nobody seemed to know, and he was little inclined to talk about himself. Indeed, beyond the fact that he was not only the boot-black of the Best House, but the best boot-black in any house—North or South, or East or West, and so conceded to be by the traveling public whom he served—very little was known of him or his life. He rented his stand, hired his own assistant, boarded himself, lived somewhere in the suburbs, was always at his post by daylight and usually remained until dark. His assistant stayed until nine or ten at night, and came later in the morning—there was not often more than one could attend to until after eight o'clock. Two days in each week Pactolus Prime himself remained until ten and his assistant left at noon. One or two days in the week he took a holiday, and in the afternoon was usually found in one of the galleries at the Capitol, listening to the

debates. Here he always occupied the same seat unless it chanced to be filled on his arrival, and then sat in the one nearest to it which he found vacant. Nearly everybody in Washington knew him by sight, and many members of Congress and high officials of the government, by name.

He was not a man of many words, but his deeds were unexceptionable. No boot ever left his hands until its luster was perfect, and no customer departed from his stand with any removable dust upon his clothing. Sometimes he talked with his customers, but never about them. If he heard what they said of each other, he never repeated it. He never answered inquiries about them, either. No matter how recently he had tapped a gentleman's foot to show that his work was done, he could never be made to remember when he had last seen him. He baffled all questions by an unhesitating denial of recollection; his assistant by the denial of knowledge. No detective had ever learned anything from him to a patron's disadvantage, and no assistant of his had ever been called to testify as to the whereabouts of a customer at a particular hour.

But if he said little, he well knew how to make others talk, and was considered a very superior man for one in his station, by those

who loved the sound of their own voices. So, too, though he would not gossip, he was always eager to listen to the discussion of public affairs, and never hesitated to express an opinion thereon. He was not exactly a politician, but had his own ideas, was considered a close observer, and not seldom proved himself a sound adviser. Statesmen were not ashamed to consider his warnings, and more than once sporting men had risked their money on his political predictions with noticeable advantage. He knew the "blue-book" by heart, and needed no mark of rank to enable him to give any accustomed patron his proper title. He was familiar with the status of most of those upon the civil list, and the aspirations of many who desired to get there. Perhaps a majority of the guests of the great hotel, at one time or another, confided to him something of their hopes or fears; and not a few condescended to ask his advice—some of them his aid. He paid more for his stand than many of the clerks in the Departments receive as salary, yet the proprietor leased to him at a lower figure than he would to another, because of the prudence which made him popular with the guests.

Nobody knew whether his profits were great or small, unless it was his assistant. He never

boasted of good fortune nor bewailed bad luck. Some thought he must have grown rich, others wondered how he could live and pay the rent he did. It was whispered among the guests that he was a good man to apply to in an emergency. The clerk, after a peculiarly piteous appeal from an unfortunate player or unexpectedly embarrassed wayfarer, sometimes dropped a hint that Prime might help him out of his trouble. He often raised small sums, sometimes very considerable ones, to accommodate people in such unpleasant predicament. He always acted cautiously, yet he had been known to obtain money on all sorts of pledges, watches, diamonds—even horses and patents which were not regarded as absolutely good security for the sums advanced. If these ventures ever resulted in loss no one knew it, neither the profit, if any there were. Some thought he ventured his own money, some that he was another's agent. There was a general belief that he was very fortunate in these ventures, and among gamblers there was a superstition that it brought good luck to borrow of him. It was noticeable that he could never be induced to serve one whom he had once refused.

This was about all the clerk, proprietor, or any employé of the "Best House" could have

told about Pactolus Prime, for though he was a man of mark in his way, he lived his own life and seemed to have neither family nor intimates. Those whom he served usually spoke of him as "Prime"; some called him "Uncle Prime," or simply "Uncle"; one or two addressed him as "Pactolus"; while to the servants at the hotel and his assistant, he was always "Mistah" Prime. Though respected by all, he was very far from being popular with the colored element of the city's population. Indeed, he seemed to be shunned rather than sought by his own people, except in emergencies when the interests of the race were clearly at stake.

His appearance was very striking,—full of incongruities that attracted attention yet were hard to define. At first sight and at a little distance, he seemed an old man; on closer inspection one detected neither wrinkles nor muscular deterioration. In his prime he must have been above the medium height, slenderly rather than strongly built. He was stoop-shouldered, but his chest did not lack depth. His arms were long and his hands narrow, with white, hard nails that somehow seemed out of place upon the fingers of one in his condition. A racial expert—one of the old slave-traders, for instance—would have found it hard to reconcile those nails with the color

of the hands, according to the theories that prevailed among the sagacious dealers in human flesh of a generation ago. The sense of narrowness in his figure was perhaps increased by the fact that his right leg seemed to turn inward at the knee, or rather turned outward below the knee, until the foot was almost at a right angle with its fellow. It dragged after the other in walking, and was used as a sort of fleshly ratchet to hold what the left had gained, instead of being sent forward to conquer space on its own account.

But the countenance of the bootblack of the "Best House" was even more noticeable than his form. A narrow, almost pinched face, growing broad across the eyes, with a high forehead, a straight nose having that flexibility of nostril which is claimed to be indicative of the Caucasian, thin lips, and a peculiar leaden-gray complexion that seemed singularly pervasive of his whole being, were the things which first attracted the attention of a stranger. Closer observation showed that the same blue-gray tint seemed to be even intensified upon the lips, which lacked all trace of redness, so that the rows of short, even teeth showed with startling whiteness between them. After a time, one became conscious, as he studied the physiognomy, that a part of its

strange effect was due to the entire absence of hair. His head was bald—not partially, but absolutely. The black knitted cap he wore could not conceal that fact. There was no trace of beard, and even the great, round, silver-mounted spectacles could not hide the absence of eyebrows on the somewhat prominent forehead. These glasses effectually concealed his eyes, except when the light was good, as it seldom was in the wash-room of the great hotel.

Such, as near as words can picture him, was the man who came down the stairs, turned up the lights in the wash-room, and began to undo the package he had received from the clerk. When he had taken off the cover of the box and undid a light paper wrapping, he took out an overcoat made of rich material, with a fur lining and furred sleeves.

“That’s a nice coat,” he said, after examining it carefully, “and it was kind in Ben to get it for me. He ought not to have done it, though; he don’t get wages enough not to have plenty of use for his money without buying such a present as that for me. I had about made up my mind to offer him a better chance, and this opens the way to do it.”

There was hardly a trace, in this monologue, of the negro dialect which had been noticeable

in his conversation a little while before, but on the contrary a smoothness and accuracy of enunciation which showed that the bootblack of the "Best House" had not associated with the brainiest men of the nation without learning the refinements of speech that prevail among them. He took out a card which he found in one of the pockets of the coat and read:

"For PACTOLUS PRIME, ESQ.

CHRISTMAS GIFT."

"What does he want to tag the 'Esquire' to it for? The idea of calling a man of my complexion 'Esquire!' No one but a nigger would think of doing so. It doesn't mean anything among white men, but no white man would ever use it in addressing a nigger. If it does not mean rank, it at least means equality. 'Christmas Gift,' too! Well, I'm glad he's a nigger. I should hate to get a present that really meant consideration from a white man. There's no danger, though," he added with a quiet laugh. "I suppose I'll get the worth of that coat in extra fees to-day, but it will all be flung to me like a biscuit to a dog after a good day's sport. That's a white man's notion of kindness to a nigger."

The white teeth, showing between the drawn blue lips, made the man's sneer horribly sar-

donic. He threw the coat on one of the chairs, took out a bunch of keys, opened a drawer in the dais, and spread out on the platform the instruments of his vocation—a half dozen brushes, a sponge, a scraper, and a bunch of cotton waste. Then he lifted out a flat marble slab, took it over to one of the wash-stands, sponged it off, and bringing it back wiped it dry with the shreds. After that he put on it a small quantity of blacking with a spatula, moistened it with liquids from two or three different bottles—ejecting them with a quick jerk through quills set in the corks—worked it evenly and carefully with the spatula, testing its consistency now and then until he seemed satisfied with the result.

“Queer, nobody ever found out the secret of this mixture,” he said, as he watched it drip from the edge of the spatula. “Ben mixes it almost as well as I do, but I don’t think he has any idea what it’s made of. I’ve made a good thing by it and there’s a fortune in it yet. Everybody thinks the excellence and durability of our “shines” depend upon the way the work is done—and there’s a good deal in that, too—but all the pains in the world wouldn’t do it with any other blacking ever invented. I’ve thought sometimes I’d patent it, but if I did I’d have to reveal the secret. I’m

going out of business pretty soon, but I'll give it to Ben; and he—well, maybe he'll find as good a man to give it to when he comes to retire. To *retire*! Think of it! A bootblack *retiring*—as if he was a banker! A nigger boot-black, too!”

The man laughed at his strange conceit, looked at his watch, then at the window where the day was beginning to show, and turned his attention to preparing another portion of the liquid whose virtues he had commemorated for the use of his assistant.

IV.

MASTER AND DISCIPLE.

“ I HOPE Benny won't forget it's Christmas,” said Prime, when he had put everything in order for the day's labor. “ They'll be a little slow at the start, but when they begin to come, there'll be a jam—everybody in a hurry and each one wanting to be served first. It's queer how much more leisure people have on work-days than on holidays. The rush may not begin for an hour—probably won't, but I wish Benny would come for all that. It's always better to wait for the crowd than expect a crowd to wait for you.”

Hardly had he uttered these words when a smartly dressed young man, with blue eyes, dark curling hair, and trim, erect figure, came running down the stairs.

“ Good morning, Mr. Prime,” he exclaimed, “ Christmas Gift, sir. Were you afraid I'd be late? I meant to have told you I'd be on time. Take a seat, sir, and let me give you a shine before the rush begins. Plenty of time, sir,” he added, as Prime hesitated.

The young man bustled about, taking off his gloves and removing his coat and cuffs as he spoke. He was Prime's assistant, whom he had called a "nigger," though it was difficult to find any trace of African lineage in form or feature. His manner to his employer was distinctly deferential, though he rattled on with the self-consciousness which betrays its purpose.

"How are you feeling this morning, sir? Must have been pretty cold getting in so early. You ought to have a better overcoat than the old one you have worn so long. I declare it's a disgrace to the shop. Hello? What's this?" he asked in pretended surprise, taking up the Christmas Gift which Prime had left on one of the chairs. "Oh, I see Santa Claus has remembered you! Just the thing you needed, too! Well, well, Mr. Prime, you are in luck as usual."

"Thar, thar, Benny," said the old man, lapsing readily into the dialect he sometimes used, as he spoke to his assistant, "ye needn't go on a-makin' strange o' that ar coat. Ye know mighty well whar it come from, an' I 'spect it made quite a hole in your pocket-book, too. I'm sure I'm much obleeged to ye. 'Twas very thoughtful, though it's much too good for my wear. It would ruin my business if I was seen with it on—it would, really."

The last words were hurried, as if to avoid the cough that came after them.

"But your cough has been very bad of late," said the young man anxiously.

"It has been mighty troublesome," said the old man. "Can't imagine how I got such a deep cold. Everybody says it's workin' down here where it's hot an' damp, but this is just about the only place I'm free of this cough. You know I hardly ever have a bad spell here."

"Don't you think you ought to favor yourself more?" asked the assistant.

"I'll wear your coat, if that's what you mean," answered the old man with a smile on his thin lips.

"Don't you think you ought to ride back and forth?"

"La, Benny, I aint sick."

"You haven't eaten your lunch in ever so long," asserted Benny dubiously.

"I don't have much appetite, that's a fact. But don't you be troubled; I'll come out all right. I've been sort of ailin' for a little while; lucky it's always worst when there's least to do. Perhaps you're right, though: it's most sure to come on after an hour or two of hard work or a bit of walk in the cold. How d'ye think t'would do for me to take a partner?" asked the old man, eyeing the younger keenly,

as he applied the blacking to one of his shoes.

"Wouldn't it be better to give up business entirely?" asked the other. "I don't want to pry into your affairs, Mr. Prime, but everybody says you could afford it, and if you can, it seems to me—it really does, sir,"—he repeated deprecatingly. He did not finish the sentence.

"Perhaps I could and perhaps I couldn't," interrupted Prime sharply. "I haven't any notion of doing it just now, that's certain: but I am goin' to take a partner."

The young man made no reply, and the elder watched him narrowly, as he worked the brushes back and forth with swift, skillful strokes.

"You know I don't give Christmas presents?" he said querulously after a while.

"I have heard you say so, sir."

"I shan't give you any."

"I didn't expect it."

"You didn't? Why?"

"There is no reason why you should."

"Why did you give me one, then?"

"To show my respect, sir."

"Oh!" almost sneeringly. "You think you are able to make such presents, I suppose?"

"You have been very kind to me, sir,—more like a father than an employer. Mother always says so."

"Does? Judges me by *your* father, probably."

The young man flushed even to his neck and ears under the brutal taunt.

"She meant it kindly, sir," he answered after a moment. His voice trembled.

"Of course," apologetically; "she must be a good woman."

"Indeed she is," said the young man, accepting the tacitly proffered reparation. "You ought to know her."

"I?" exclaimed the elder with a start, "I don't need to—I—I've known women enough."

The young man did not answer, but having given a finishing touch to the boot on which he had been working, he gave it the smart professional tap which indicates that the operator has completed his task and is ready for the other.

"You're a good boy, Benny," said Prime in a softer voice when the other boot had been adjusted to the foot-rest.

"Thank you, sir."

"You've always been a good boy, Ben, an' I want to see you do well. How long is it you've been with me?"

"Five years, sir."

"Is it, now? Well, well, how time does fly! An' you're—how old?"

"Past twenty, sir."

"So? I didn't think it. Well, you've been a good boy—couldn't hardly have done better if you'd been my own child."

"I've often wished I were," said Ben earnestly.

"Were what?" asked the old man sharply. "My child! Don't ever let me hear any such foolishness again! Don't ever lisp it! Don't ever dream of it! Thank God you're as near white as you are—so near one would need a spy-glass to find out whether you are black or white! Thank God for it every day. It's about all you've got to thank him for; so you need to do it all the more. A nigger is expected to have more gratitude for smaller favors than any other created bein', an' you ought to begin to practice thankfulness early. You'll need a good deal of grace to keep you from gettin' tired of the business 'fore you git to my age, anyhow.

"Thank God every day that you're white—to all appearance, at least. Of course, it won't do you any 'good just here an' now. You're known here as a nigger, an' the whiter a nigger is, the less a white man cares for him. As long as a man's black he only just despises him; but when he begins to grow white he hates him."

"Why should that be?"

"Why? Don't ask me," answered the old man testily. "You might as well ask why one man is white and another black—why God gave the white man a right to take all he could get, and made it the nigger's duty to be grateful for what's left. Perhaps no one is very fond of the evidence of his own evil, and every one like you is a living testimony of the white man's falsehood, treachery and crime. Don't ask such questions, Benny. Be grateful you're white an' don't be too inquisitive about how you became so. It may not do *you* much good, but your children may have a heap better chance in this world, and an even show for the next because of it. If you work it right you may even get to be a white man yourself."

"I'm a Negro, sir," said the young man proudly, raising his head as he spoke, "and I do not care who knows it: I've no wish to be anything else."

"Don't say that, Benny, don't ever utter any such foolishness! There can't any colored man have an even chance in this world nor a fair show of gettin' to the next. You might as well say you'd rather go a-foot than ride on a train. Instead of talking in that way you ought to look things square in the face, do the best for yourself, an' get to be a white man as fast as

possible. An' the first thing is to get rich. If you were rich, Benny, with your good looks, all you'd have to do to be white, would be to go where you wasn't known. Now, that's just what I've planned out for you to do. I'll take you into partnership this year; I'm not going to tell you what it's worth. There's more'n boot-blackin' in it, if it's run right. Then next year, I'll get out entirely. We'll patent the blackin', an' I'll 'tend to makin' an' sellin' that. You can hold on here as long as you like: sell out; take a trip to Europe: come back, settle down somewhere out West or anywhere else, take a new name—I don't reckon you've any special claim to the one you've used thus far—and keep right on makin' money, never lettin' on that you're not as white as anybody. That's the future for you, Benny, an' you ought to be glad of one that aint any harder. It seems queer, but the one thing you've got to be thankful for is not the goodness of God, but the meanness of man. God made your people black, and man's wickedness made you mighty near white. Don't quarrel with your luck, Benny. It's better to be a white pauper than a rich nigger; but there aint any reason why you shouldn't be rich and white both. Don't pretend you don't want to be white. It's like the devil claiming he wouldn't care to be in heaven.

He may feel himself just as good as the best of the angels, but he don't have as good things as they, and isn't half as much respected as the meanest of them. You can't help the rest of the colored race by remaining a nigger, and you can do a good thing for yourself and save your children from an inheritance of woe by making yourself white. That's sense now, Benny, and I offer you an easy way to do it. What do you say to it?"

The young man worked on in silence.

"What do you say, Benny?" asked the old man anxiously. "I couldn't advise you better if you were my own son; I couldn't, really. There's a fortune in the blacking itself, when it comes to be known. And I'll work it on equal shares and you needn't be known in the matter at all. Don't you like the plan, Benny?"

There was something pathetic in the expression of the pinched face which looked down upon the young man, while its owner thus volunteered to devote himself to the happiness of the other.

Though unfinished, he tapped the boot on which he was engaged with the brush from force of habit, and straightening up looked into his patron's face as he replied:

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Prime. You've

always been good to me—very good, indeed—but I can't do it, sir—I can't do it."

"Can't do it? asked the elder in surprise. "Why not?"

"You know I've been studying, sir?"

"Well?"

"And I've decided upon another profession."

"Another what?"

"I'm going to be a lawyer, sir."

"Oh, I see; you are getting above your business!" exclaimed Prime, springing to his feet and hopping off the platform. "Don't you touch my boots again, sir! I can't have a man black my shoes that thinks he's too good to handle a brush! You jes' git outen this! I don't want any fine gentleman workin' at my stand!"

"As you please, Mr. Prime," said the young man quietly. "I am willing to stay until you can get a man in my place, but I am not going to be a bootblack all my life just because I happen to have a little colored blood in my veins."

"You fool!" shouted the old man, towering over his assistant, his face distorted with rage. "You think it is the calling that makes one a nigger, not the color of the skin. Don't you know that if the most gifted man in the land

was known to have a drop of Negro blood in his veins, nine-tenths of all the Christian people in the country would shun him as he were a monster? It don't hurt a white man to black boots and won't help a nigger to practice law. He'll be a nigger, just the same!"

"I'd rather be a man and black, than a mere money-bags and white," said the young man, doggedly.

"Who wants you to be any less a man?" growled Prime, as he shuffled along the dais and began to re-arrange his brushes. "Isn't it better to be a man and *white*, than be the same man and *black*?"

"Not if one *is* black," said the youngster sullenly.

"But suppose he might be either; how would he count the most—enjoy the most—as a white man or as a nigger?"

It is impossible to describe the scorn and bitterness the old man threw into the term he always employed to describe his race. It has been denominated an "Americanism," by a recent English writer, but it might more properly be called an Anglo-Saxonism. It is universal rather than local in its use, and whatever may have been its origin has come to represent the concentrated gall of Anglo-Saxon hatred and contempt for any people

they can oppress without fear of interference by other nations. It is the unconscious expression of the irrepressible tendency of this liberty-loving, Christian race, the world over, to oppress the poor and degrade the weak in order conclusively to demonstrate their own "inherent superiority" and the ennobling influence of that religion which commands nations and peoples, as well as individuals, to "do unto others as ye would that they should do to you." The English tongue has carried it, as a scepter of authority, around the globe. Black and brown and yellow, all on whom it has set its foot,—the white slaves of the Barbadoes, the varied types of India, the Malay, the Chinaman, the Soudanese, the Maori, the Bushman, the Kaffirs, the Zulus, and whatsoever other race the just, humane and liberty-loving Englishman has found it profitable to oppress or destroy—these he has always marked for reprobation, and cut off from any claim to equality of right or display of sympathy on the part of others, by bestowing upon them this term expressive of the concentrated contempt of centuries—"nigger!"

That the old man felt to the full extent its degrading force there could be no doubt, and the young man's flushed face showed how keenly he felt the poisoned lash of the other's

sarcasm. He said nothing, however, but went quietly on with his preparations for the day's work.

"Listen to my words, Benny," said the old man at length, in a changed voice. "I've trod the wine-press, and I know what it is to live under the curse of God and the contempt of man. Don't volunteer to carry a load you ain't called upon to bear. Be as much of a man as you choose, but be a white man. Don't transmit the degrading curse to your children! Remember it is more tolerable to be a leper than to be a Negro in a Christian land! I have known women, Benny—good women, too, who sincerely believed that the act would doom their souls to the pangs of endless torment,—who throttled their innocent offspring to save them from the doom of the slave. I have heard gray-haired mothers—more than one of them—exult in their childless condition, and thank God for the courage which had enabled them to face the fires of hell in order to save the sweet little ones they had borne from the stain of pollution. It is horrible, but I never dared to blame them, Benny. Yet slavery was never half so great a curse as that brand of infamy which stamps the soul at its birth with ineradicable inferiority. If the white Christian's idea of the Negro is

a true one—and you must remember that we have no means of judging a faith but by the words and works of its followers,—the man who begets colored children to suffer the pangs of such incurable and predestined inequality, is worse than a brute. It would be a thousand times more merciful to kill the little innocents than to permit them to suffer the woe of hopeless debasement. If this infamous doctrine be true, the Christian God is a being of more subtle and relentless cruelty than any pagan deity the human mind ever conceived. Remember, Benny, when you think of becoming a colored man by choice, or refusing to make yourself a white man, as you might, what a world of unmerited degradation you are bequeathing to your children and their offspring,—God only knows for how many ages! Remember this, while you are thus lightly choosing debasement as your lot, that there are thousands of your race that would gladly lie down and be flayed alive, if they might rise up white—the peers of white men and equal heirs of right and privilege with white Christians!”

There was something very solemn in the old man's tones, and his unusual use of the correct racial term made his words peculiarly impressive. The young man looked at him in wonder not unmixed with dread, for the uncanni-

ness of his visage was greatly heightened by excitement. He could not controvert the views of the man upon whose judgment and experience he had come to rely with peculiar confidence, and his mind was filled with horror at the picture his companion had drawn. Rarely had he known him to manifest excitement on any subject, and never before had he heard him express himself upon their race's relation to civilization and Christianity, with anything like such intensity and force of language. He was appalled, almost stunned, by the terrible words—all the more that he could not deny their truth. As he stood dumbly picking at the brush he held, now and then running his palm absently along its bristled face, a thousand facts in his own experience rose up to confirm the old man's words. His heart cried out against it. His very nature revolted at the thought that truth could be so terrible. He had been so full of hope, aspiration—the desire to do great things, to rank with the best and be deemed as worthy as the worthiest! He had been so strong! His hope had been so bright and his courage so high! And now all this dream had faded. He was—a nigger! He sighed wearily, sat down upon the edge of the dais, and tried manfully to pull himself together to face his destiny.

The chill morning light had crept into the window, while this conversation had been going on. A closed coupé whirled swiftly past, going toward the front of the hotel. Prime glanced up at the little rifts of dust and snow the wind bore backward from the wheels.

"It's goin' to be a bad day," said he, breaking the silence and relapsing into his ordinary tone.

"I'm afraid so," responded Benny, absently.

The old man took his Christmas gift from the chair on which it had lain and hung it on a hook at the farther end of the long, narrow room, giving it an instinctive brush with the wisp-broom he held in his hand as he did so. As he shuffled back to his place, footsteps were heard upon the stairs.

"Christmas Gift, Pactolus," said a cheerful voice.

"Mornin', sir; same to you, sir," answered the old man suavely as he turned, and helped to remove the gentleman's overcoat. "You are in a mighty hurry for a shine this mornin', Mr. Phelps," he continued as he adjusted the patron's foot more firmly on the rest and prepared to begin his work. "You're our very first customer."

The boot-black of the Best House addressed his early patron with deferential familiarity.

"Well, I had not much the start," was the

answer, with a nod toward the stairway from which the hum of voices came.

"Here they come," said the elder man with a quick glance at his assistant, while he addressed himself vigorously to his task. "Look alive, now! Time's money to-day," he said in an explanatory undertone to his patron.

The Christmas rush which had begun an hour ago at the office of the Best House had reached the stand of Pactolus Prime. The old man and his helper both worked with the rapidity and skill which come only from long practice.

"What do you think he'll average to-day?" asked one customer of another as they came down the stairs.

"Well," said the other sagely, "probably twenty an hour—both of them, that is."

"That's twenty dollars a day, at a dime apiece!"

"And half of them will be quarters to-day."

"Who wouldn't be a boot-black! Why, he ought to be a millionaire!"

"But he pays a higher rent for his stand than you do for your house."

"You don't say? Is this taffy he's giving me, or are you really a bloated bondholder, Uncle?" asked the first speaker as he tucked a

newspaper under his arm and lighted a cigar while waiting his turn.

"Oh, I've made a little money at the business," answered Prime quietly, without intermitting his work.

There was a laugh from the bystanders. Every one is good-natured on Christmas Day, and a laugh is easily started. Phelps looked down at the old man bending over his boot, with a quizzical smile.

V.

WHAT THE "HERALD-ANGELS" SAW.

IT is only reasonable to suppose that the "herald angels" should feel some curiosity to observe the results of that religious force they were selected to announce to the world, and it is but natural to infer that this desire must grow all the stronger

———" 'gainst that season comes ,
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated."

However pure in purpose, it is hardly to be supposed, that even the angelic nature is universal in its scope; and curiosity, it is presumable, must always exist until perfect knowledge has left nothing to be made known. It would seem equally natural, also, to infer that these supernal existences, not being gifted, so far as we are informed, with the divine attribute of omniscience, would naturally select the capital of the American Republic as the most advantageous position for noting the growth and exemplification of Christian ideas, after almost, nineteen centuries of application

to human life, and more than ten centuries of undisputed sway among a people admittedly foremost in their devotion to Christian principles. For it cannot be doubted that these notable intelligences must be aware that the American people claim a paramount position among the nations of the earth, as exponents of the essentially Christian ideas of liberty, justice, and equality of right, privilege, and opportunity. They would certainly not be ignorant of the fact that we have become, by virtue of our pre-eminent religious zeal, the missionary center of the world, sending devoted proselyters to uprear the standard of the Faith in every land—among the hills where the Holiest wandered “an hungered,” and taught those who “knew not whereof he spake”; amid the sands of the desert, whence Augustine, the Numidian, went forth in search of the Christ whose apostle had declared that “All are one in Christ Jesus”; in the very city where Luther proclaimed anew the unfettered truth; in the islands of the sea and “the uttermost parts of the earth,” according to the Divine commandment. Knowing this, they would no doubt expect the fundamental principles of the new dispensation, of whose birth they were the primal witnesses, to have become instinctive impulses among our people, so that

in all collective as well as individual matters, the first inquiry of the Nineteenth Century American, in whatever juncture of private or public affairs, would naturally be, "What do justice and equity toward my fellow-men require that I should do?"

If the angels aforesaid were really permitted to indulge this very natural desire to witness the perfect flower of the ideas whose germination they once hailed with exuberant acclaim, and did actually hover about the gusty purlieus of Washington on that Christmas morning in the year of grace 18—, I greatly fear they may have been disappointed in their expectations. Of course, they would make due allowance for the weather, understanding very well that heat expands and cold contracts all substances, and that nothing is more sensitive to climatic change than religious sentiment. It is doubtful if they would give much attention to the church services. They must know that people always wear their best clothes, morally as well as physically speaking, on such occasions, and would naturally desire, unless gifted with that Divine power of introspection which leaves each soul naked to the inquirer's gaze, to see the life of the Christian capital in its more ordinary and less restrained conditions, in order that they might fairly judge of the in-

fluence upon the general life, of those mighty truths which were expected to so change the character and conditions of universal humanity as to revolutionize human impulses and minimize human wofulness.

For such a purpose one could hardly imagine a better point of observation than the basement of the Best House. The office and corridors above were by this time so full of surging, clamoring crowds that even an angel might well ask to be excused from attempting a correct estimate of their individual or collective character. In the barber shop and at the boot-blackening stand, however, there is not only a sufficient pause to enable one to study his man a little at leisure, but the observer is apt to take him somewhat off his guard and get glimpses of his nature that he is not accustomed to reveal. It is always to one beneath him in the social scale that one shows his true character. That is why no man is ever a hero to his valet. The boot-black enjoys similar advantages and is pretty sure, if he wishes, to see completely through the man he looks up to. It is possible, however, that some angels, like certain Christians, may be a little scrupulous as to the company they keep, and so would prefer never to know the truth, than to go where it may best be learned. At any rate, Prime's

shop would have been a good location for an angel who wanted to obtain reliable data for a little cherubic figuring on the "times" and "seasons" of the Apocalypse.

Before Pactolus Prime had finished cleaning the right shoe of his first customer the chairs upon the dais were all occupied, and two or three other patrons were waiting their turns here and there about the room. All of them greeted the proprietor of the "stand" pleasantly, and he assured each that he would be ready for him, "in jest a minit." Most of them spoke to Ben, also, for the young man, instead of taking his excited employer at his word, had remained at his post, and was showing himself a worthy pupil of the boot-black of the "Best." In fact, both Prime and his assistant were experts, the tools they used were the best obtainable and always ready to their hands. The boot was first brushed clean; the surface lightly sponged; the blacking, already prepared, was quickly and evenly applied; a few strokes with long, soft brushes; then the swift recurrent play of a pair with stiff bristles; some strokes across the instep, a quick breath upon the toe, and the even, polished surface needed no farther touches. A tap upon the foot; the process is repeated; the patron steps down; another takes his place; the ever-ready

wisp-broom searches the bits of dust upon the clothing; a dime passes from hand to hand—on Christmas it is perhaps a quarter, and the customer says: "Never mind the change!" Then there is a bow, a word of thanks, and the Christmas greetings are repeated with as much fervor as anywhere, and probably as much sincerity as usual.

It was not until Prime was applying the blacking to the second boot of his first customer that he again addressed him:

"'Pears to me you are out mighty early this mornin', Mr. Phelps?" he said inquiringly.

The grave, kindly face looked down upon the black head bowed over his foot, with a curiously expressive smile.

"Well, yes," the patron, who was evidently a favorite with the owner of the stand, replied, in a tone that betrayed the familiarity between them. "You see I have been intrusted with the delivery of a Christmas gift of some value, and it behooves an assistant of St. Nicholas to be stirring early."

"So?" rejoined the bootblack, significantly. "I shouldn't have thought you'd have waited ter have yer boots blacked at all."

"But it's a lady, Prime, and you wouldn't

have even the agent of Santa Claus enter a lady's presence without due preparation?"

"Plenty of time for that," said Prime, drawing back his head to inspect his work. "I'll lay a bit to a nickel she ain't out of bed yet."

"Oh, you don't know her, or I am sure you wouldn't say that."

"Course not; I was jes' speakin' on general principles."

"General principles wont do for particular cases. You see this young lady's been badly treated and cannot be expected to sleep late."

"Been flirtin' with some youngster, I s'pose."

"Worse than that."

"Worse? In love, then."

"Yes, and with an old man, too!"

"Sho! sho! 'taint so, now? An' he's sendin' her a present?"

"Exactly."

"An' you a-carryin' it for him?" archly.

"Just so," meaningly.

"Now, Mr. Phelps, I shouldn't hev thought it—an' you a family man, too!"

There was a laugh among the bystanders, and expressions of mock concern for the grave-faced lawyer, who made no attempt to check the merriment.

"You mustn't tell on me, Pac," said Phelps in assumed anxiety, biting the corners of his lip as if to repress a smile at the old man's mirth.

"Not for the world, sir!" answered Prime gaily, "but if I did the Missus wouldn't believe me—known you too long for that, sir. 'Taint your fault, nuther—jes' yer misfortin'. Comes of bein' a lawyer, I reckon."

"Certainly; the old man wouldn't do the errand himself, you see, so I have to do it for him."

"'Fraid she'd catch him in a lie, I reckon."

"Something of that sort, I think."

"Wal, he's an old rascal, that's what he is," said Prime, emphatically. "Did you ever notice that most bad men are old, Mr. Phelps? But a lawyer has to serve them just the same—saint and sinner—Christmas and week-days, I s'pose."

"Well, of course; a client is a client, but I have rarely had a more unpleasant task than this."

There was a curious cadence in his voice that half-belied his words, or seemed intended to convey a special meaning to some of his hearers.

"I should not think you would do it, then," said a mild-looking man wearing a white tie, who sat in the chair next to him. "It always

seems like sinning on the Sabbath to do a questionable act on Christmas day."

"A sort of aggravation of the offense, eh?" asked the lawyer with a smile.

"Well, yes," responded the minister, "of course, wrong is wrong, and time or place can make no difference to the Divine, but it does seem worse to us; doesn't it now?"

"Undoubtedly," said the other, "but I do not regard the act I am commissioned to perform as involving any moral obliquity—only monumental stupidity."

"Do you have such cases often?" asked Prime, who seemed to have lost his ill-temper and to be enjoying the conversation with a zest hardly to be accounted for by its character. "I'd like ter know; cause Benny here, has got tired of blackin' boots like a nigger, and wants to be a lawyer like a white man."

"Well, why shouldn't he be one?" asked the lawyer, drawing his eyebrows down and looking sharply under them at the old man.

"He can't be a white man, no matter what he does; and the nearer white he is, the less use white folks will have for him. They can afford to be kind to a black nigger like me, you see, but one who is whiter than some white men, like Ben—pshaw! such a one is an object of suspicion—as far as you can see him! He's

got no chance to be anything more or less than a nigger, and a nigger's got no call to be a lawyer. What's the good of law to him—or religion either, for that matter? Money's the god he ought to worship. Let him get money and buy whatever can be bought; and let the rest go. It may do for white folks to worship God; but niggers ought to worship Mammon. That's their only chance for salvation."

"You shouldn't speak so lightly of religious matters, my friend," said the minister, gravely.

"Lightly!" exclaimed Prime. "I was never more in earnest in my life. Isn't that what you tell them, sir? Don't you tell them they must wait for their rights until they get rich—until they have property,—and don't you know all the time they can't get property, not much, at least, until they have knowledge? That's what a President said—I heard him myself,—right over yonder, when we asked him to try and do something to give us a little learning, and a sort of fair show in the world. He didn't say he couldn't do anything; he didn't seem to think there was anything to be done. He just told us to go home and wait and work until we got as much money as white folks, and then—"

"What did he promise you then?" asked Phelps.

"Nothing," said Prime. "He didn't seem to think we'd need anything more: an' 'taint likely we would. Now, I ask you, Mr. Phelps, what'll Benny gain by a change of trade? He'll still be a servant, won't he? Is it any less honorable to black boots for dimes, than do errands you don't approve of for dollars? I'll warrant your task is the more unpleasant."

"No doubt it is," said the other meaningly, "but you need have no fear that he will ever have such an errand to perform."

"Why not?" asked the old man boldly.

"The conditions are not likely to occur again."

"The conditions!" repeated Prime, who had now finished his work and standing up before his patron peered at him excitedly through his glasses, "the conditions! Remember, Mr. Phelps, 'yesterday's miracle is to-morrow's commonplace.' The conditions which come only once in a lifetime now, may happen every day in the future."

"Possibly," said the lawyer gravely. He stepped down from the dais and extended his hand with a coin between the fingers, as the old man finished brushing his hat.

"Thank you, sah, not to-day," said the old man with serio-comic gravity. "I wouldn't want to take money from a man on such an

errand to-day—might bring me bad luck, you know!”

“All right,” said the lawyer pleasantly, putting the money in his pocket. “You can’t escape my good wishes, though. By the way, Pactolus,” he added carelessly, “you are quite sure that those papers I drew up for you the other day are just right?”

“Just right, sir, just right.”

“Because if they are not,—they have not yet been delivered, you know.”

He looked at the other earnestly, as if hoping for an answer which he did not expect.

“Quite sure, sir; they’re just right!” answered the old man firmly, meeting his glance for an instant, and then turning back to serve the next patron.

The lawyer started to ascend the stairs with a troubled look upon his face.

“Good-morning, Mr. Phelps,” said a young man approaching him with an easy, familiar manner; “can’t you give me an item for a ‘Christmas gift’? Small favors thankfully received, you know; anything from half a page to half a stickful.”

“I believe not this morning, Mr. Stearns,” was the pleasant reply as the lawyer extended his hand. “How are you getting along on the *Index*? Well, I hope?”

"Oh, I can't complain; I've a fair enough lay, thanks to your endorsement."

"Not at all; that merely gave you a chance. One may open the gate for another—get him entered in the race of life—but each must do his own running."

"So I suppose; well, I will try not to make you sorry for giving me a chance."

"I have no fear of that," said the elder heartily. "How is your mother now?"

"Oh, much better, thank you."

"Well, you know the nautical injunction to the man at the wheel," said the lawyer, shaking his finger at him impressively, "'Keep her so'!"

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the youngster smartly, touching his hat.

The lawyer smiled approvingly.

"Give her my Christmas greeting, if I should be unable to see her to-day," he said moving toward the stairs.

"Thank you, sir," replied the other—"but—Mr. Phelps—"

"Well?" looking back inquiringly.

"That matter you were speaking about just now,—excuse me—there seemed to be a chance for an item there—if—if you are at liberty to speak of it, that is. A rumor of that sort, you know—"

The young man's enthusiasm seemed to die out as he watched the lawyer's grave, immobile face.

A good many had come and gone while Phelps had occupied the chair, for the old man had dallied unaccountably with his first customer, but there were still two or three who had heard the conversation with Prime. These leaned eagerly forward to hear what reply would be made to the reporter's request. Ben glanced curiously around and was evidently on the alert to catch every word of the conversation going on behind him. Pactolus Prime worked on in silence, apparently indifferent.

"No," answered the lawyer earnestly, glancing at Prime as he spoke. "I cannot reveal a client's business. Yet this is a case which I wish all the world might know about. An old man insists upon giving a young lady the better part of the savings of a lifetime!"

"Humph!" said Prime with a snort, "an' his blessin' with it, I'spose!"

"And the young lady?" asked the reporter, scarcely repressing a smile of sarcastic pity for the verdancy of his elderly friend, "she is expected to be very grateful to this benefactor—of course?"

"He has made it impossible for her to learn the source of her good fortune."

"Impossible!"

"Absolutely."

"Do you mean to say he would not receive any credit for generosity should he choose to reveal himself?"

"Not the least," replied the lawyer with emphasis.

"And this Christmas gift amounts to a considerable sum?"

"A very respectable fortune."

"And the giver does not expect any reward?"

"He hopes to make the lady happy."

"W-h-e-w!" whistled the reporter. "That's too sensational!"

"No relation of his?" asked the mild-faced divine.

"None whatever."

"Well, he *is* a big fool!" grunted Prime.

"He must be a good Christian," said the minister.

"He is not so considered, I am sorry to say," answered Phelps with some show of irritation on his wrinkled brow.

"It's a pity," rejoined the other with a sigh.

"That he is not esteemed a Christian?" asked Phelps sharply.

"Oh, no," answered the other gently; "that matters little; it is a pity there are so few like

him. It makes no difference what a man is called if he seeks the happiness of others, forgetful of himself."

"Suppose you called him a 'nigger,'" said Prime, looking up from his work with one of his ghastly grins.

"Don't think because you are an unbeliever that all your race are infidels or hypocrites, Uncle," rejoined the mild-faced man with some severity. "Remember that a greater proportion of the colored people of the United States are Christians than of any other people in the world!"

"And a bigger portion of them fools, too; isn't that so, Dominie?" asked Prime with a chuckle.

"There are a good many illiterates among them, it is true, but still—"

"About how many—nine out of ten?"

"Well, probably—of the adults."

"And what made them so? Who kept them in darkness?" exclaimed Prime fiercely, going on with his work but jerking his head over his shoulder with every backward movement and looking up over his glasses at the minister.

"Why, slavery, of course, Uncle"—apologetically.

"And what was slavery, sir?" exclaimed the old man, dropping one of his brushes and

leaning toward his listener with uplifted finger. "What was slavery? Only another name for the worship of the White Christ! You made the Negro a Christian by holding him down and pouring your doctrine into him! He was not free to choose. 'He was bullied, coerced and deceived.' He did not know what it was he professed to believe. He was not permitted to know. You would not even let him read your Holy Book! He was taught a lie—that God could be unjust—could hate and oppress a race because of the color of its skin! Do you think salvation can ever come through falsehood and crime? Will they always believe what they accepted in this way? Will not the Christianity of the children be colored by the wrongs of the parents? Oh, I know they pray and sing—aye, and almost starve themselves to give for the church; but you might almost as well call a man a drunkard because he reels and staggers and babbles when alcohol has been injected into his veins, as call these ignorant and deceived victims of a faith which measures right and wrong by the color of the skin, Christians! God! that the followers of Christ should claim merit even on Christmas Day, for the devil's work!"

"Pactolus!" said the lawyer sternly.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Phelps," said the

old man, turning towards him with great beads of sweat on his brow, "I aint a-meanin' you. If they was like you, I'd be a Christian too, I would—I swear!"

"Never mind, Pactolus, you know what I think about these things. All in good time—in good time, my friend."

The lawyer turned and extended his hand with a smile as he spoke. The old man looked at his own grimy hand; wiped it instinctively on the cloth beside the foot-rest, and then clasped the other's and shook it heartily. There was just enough of incongruity in this to waken a murmur of approval, followed by a hearty laugh, on the part of the bystanders.

"Never mind, Pactolus," the lawyer repeated pleasantly, "you've done enough to vindicate the claims of your race to recognition to-day. It does no good to disturb others' enjoyment because you see what they cannot discern."

"I 'spose you're right, Mr. Phelps,—and I give you notice, gentlemen, that if any one says another word to me about religion to-day, he may black his own boots, for all of me. You're a Christian, Mr. Phelps, and I am only a black pagan, but we manage to understand each other pretty well. Good-day, sir."

He turned to his work.

"Good-by," said Phelps. "Good-morning, gentlemen."

The lawyer went up the stairs, the reporter following carelessly. He entered a coupé that was in waiting, and the reporter hurried after it as it was driven rapidly away.

VI.

AN ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGES.

“I AM afraid, uncle,” said the minister very gently, as Phelps and the reporter disappeared, “that you are too impatient—your people I mean; you want everything at once.”

“Did anybody ever owe you money?” asked Prime.

“Unfortunately, yes,” answered the other with a smile.

“When did you ask for payment?”

“When it was due, of course. I’ve never had enough to grow careless in that respect.”

“Was it ever refused?”

“Well,” said the minister, still smiling, “it has often been neglected.”

“I suppose when payment was neglected you ceased to ask or desire it, didn’t you?”

“I have sometimes ceased to ask—never to desire.”

“And why did you cease to ask?”

“Because I grew hopeless, I suppose.”

“Did it make you especially happy to be deprived of what you had a right to receive?”

"Certainly not, but—"

"Wait a minute! If the amount thus unjustly withheld from you had embraced every cent you had earned in your whole life—the entire earnings of your parents and their parents for two centuries and a half, depriving them of every luxury, every opportunity, every privilege, every right—everything in fact except the barest necessities of existence—would you think you ought to be called 'impatient,' if you began, after waiting uncomplainingly so many years, to speak a little roughly of your debtor?"

"I suppose not; but you see—"

"One word more," said Prime respectfully, as he finished brushing the coat of his reverend customer and turned to begin work upon the boot of another who had already taken the seat, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, sir, nor to say anything you might consider disrespectful, either to yourself or your profession, but I have more feeling in this matter than you might suppose."

"Very naturally," rejoined the other, waiting to continue the conversation. "You are a colored man."

"Well, yes," said Prime, glancing up with a sardonic grin, his white teeth showing through the dark lips, "I *am* so taken and accepted; but

then you are white, so the interest should be mutual."

"I hardly see it," said the other inquiringly; "you naturally feel the wrongs your race has suffered, or which you fancy they have suffered, more keenly than we."

"In other words, you think the one who suffers is more likely to remember the wrong than the one who perpetrates it. Very likely. It doesn't seem as if it ought to be so, does it? Seems as if it ought to be just the other way—the man who does wrong ought never to be able to forget it. Perhaps that would make us all too unhappy, though. Well, I'll tell you, sir, how I feel about it. I feel as if Christianity—the followers of the white Christ—had robbed my people of two hundred and fifty years of bodily toil and rightful opportunity, taking the proceeds to add to their own wealth, their own luxury, the education of their children, the building of churches and colleges,—whatever they chose which was to their own exclusive advantage. Not a dollar nor a cent came back to us in any form. We gave and you took; that is all there is of it. You said, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord,' as well you might; and we were expected to say the same in order that we might be allowed the credit of having souls. You—American civilization, American Chris-

tianity, sir,—took our money,—the honest wages of our toil,—and no shuffling or evasion can avoid the responsibility. As Mr. Phelps said one day, ‘it’s a debt that can’t be barred by any statute of limitation.’ ”

“Well,” interrupted one to whose finely shaped boot Benny was giving a final touch, a thin-faced, positive man whose fingers worked nervously while his eyes flashed angrily as he spoke, “I wish you niggers would find out just how much the country owes you, or how much you would be satisfied with, and let us pay you off and quit fussing about it! I don’t seem to have heard of much else in my day except the wrongs of the nigger, and I’m tired—sick of the whole matter! I’d like to have the account settled and be done with it!”

“You would find it a pretty hard one to state, and harder still to pay off,” said Prime solemnly. “Such claims as ours grow fast and draw big interest.”

“Oh, we wouldn’t be particular about the amount,” said the last speaker. “I don’t think we would even ask credit for any counterclaim or set-off, if we could only stop the race’s whining and have them own up that they were satisfied for once. I’ve had enough of it myself. I’d like to see the account squared and start fresh, with the understanding that each race

was to keep up its own end hereafter and ask no favors. It wouldn't be long before you'd get tired."

"You would be the first to get tired of such a bargain," said the old man confidently.

"How so?"

"In trying to square the account."

"Why, how much do you suppose the whole value of the Negro's work in the United States as a slave would amount to?" asked the other defiantly. "During the whole time, I mean, from the day the first slave was landed at Jamestown until the last one was set free?"

"A good deal more than you would care to pay."

"Well, how much?" said the other, taking out paper and pencil. "Out with it! Let's come down to figures. I'm a traveling man and accustomed to narrow margins. Come now, set your price!"

"Well," said Prime as he finished with another customer, "I 'spose ten cents wouldn't be too high a price for a day's work, would it, over and above such board, clothes and attendance in sickness as we received?"

"Well, probably not," answered the traveling man with characteristic promptness, and evident surprise at the moderation of the demand.

"And I s'pose it wouldn't be out of the way

to estimate three-fifths of each life as work-time, at that rate, leaving out two-fifths for infancy, old age and sickness?"

"I should say that was a liberal basis on which to estimate it," interposed the minister.

"Well," said the drummer, squinting up his eyes as if making a close bargain, "considering the price per day, it can't be called unfair. That is certainly low—too low. You'll fall behind at that rate, old man. We'll pay you off at your own price and not feel it. About a cigar a day less, for each smoker in the country for a week or so, would make it all right, I should say. Put up your figures, man! Say fifteen or twenty cents a day, anyhow!"

The drummer spoke in a confident, bantering tone, shifting his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other by the motion of his lips, as he spoke, but Prime answered quietly:

"No; ten cents will do; and that'll be a heap more than we'll ever get."

"How much would it amount to? I suppose you have looked the matter up, you speak so confidently."

"Figure it out yourself," said Prime. "You kept us ignorant on purpose that we might not know what was our due and how it was taken from us. It isn't a hard sum. Benny here worked it out the other day, all by himself, so

it *must* be easy, for *he's a nigger*, gentlemen; he couldn't do a hard sum! Tell 'em about it, Benny."

"Oh, it's not difficult," said the young man, with a flush on his fair face. "You see there were two hundred and forty-seven years of bondage; there were twenty-six slaves at first and five millions at the last. Making it an even progression, counting only three hundred days to the year, and throwing off two-fifths of the whole for childhood, old age and sickness, and putting the rest at ten cents a day, and it would amount to *more than ten billions of dollars!*"

"What!" exclaimed the commercial man. "It can't be! Do you want the earth?"

"You can work it out by yourself if you think I have made a mistake," said the young man proudly.

The salesman's pencil flew over the pad. The others waited in silence for his decision.

"Well, I vow!" he muttered, as he added a cipher and marked off the decimals, "I wouldn't have thought it!"

"Is he right?" asked the minister earnestly.

"Right!" exclaimed the expert, "he's fully a half billion below the truth!"

"You don't say," murmured several of the bystanders.

"We'll throw off the odd half billion and take the rest in long-time bonds at two per cent. interest, if you please. That's fair, isn't it, Mister?" said Prime, addressing the man of samples.

"Uncle," said the other, as he put up his book and pencil and slipped down to be brushed off. "You've got me! You're right! We're your debtors and aren't likely to get square with you, either! I'm with you; send in your account! Blamed if I ever snarl at a nigger for grumbling, again."

"But the ground of indebttness hasn't been half stated yet."

"Don't want to hear any more; I've had enough. Good-by, uncle."

He dropped a liberal douceur into the young man's hand, shook his head when offered change, and had disappeared up the stairway by the time another was seated in the chair.

"I must go too," said the minister apologetically. "I had never thought of the matter in this light before. Your people certainly cannot be blamed for feeling that they have been bitterly wronged; but—was it Christianity that did it, my friend?"

"It was Christian men and women who did it—the earthly exponents of the Christian idea,—and they received the advantage," answered Prime.

"But Christianity is not responsible for all that is done even by its votaries."

"Why not? You hold Mahometanism responsible for all the ills of Turkish life and government, and credit heathenism with the woes that befall the people who practice idolatry. In like manner, Christianity is responsible for every evil it permits to exist among a Christian people—or that results from a Christian government. This amount is only a tithe of what Christianity owes my people. Who shall estimate the damages for lost opportunity, to say nothing of violated right? Who shall state the money value of two centuries of enforced ignorance and depravity? What sum could compensate a people for the stain of universal illegitimacy, the denial of fatherhood, the violation of maternal right, the debasement of female virtue, the utter effacement of all family ties and family relations, the refusal of even a family name?"

"I—I don't know," said the minister blankly. "I never thought of it in that light before. Good-morning, sir."

He seemed to forget the color of the old man's skin as he bowed respectfully to Prime and went slowly and thoughtfully up the stairs.

Several customers had come and gone during this conversation. The hands of the boot-

black and his assistant had not been idle. The knitted cap had been pushed back on Prime's head, showing the dingy scalp almost to the crown. The sweat beads stood upon his brow. The right side of his face twitched nervously, and the words flowed from his lips as if he were uttering the stored-up thoughts of a lifetime. Those who were accustomed to his usually quiet demeanor were surprised at the feeling he displayed, while his assistant glanced up at him now and then with a look almost of reverence.

"I wonder if he is right," mused the minister as he walked along the street toward a church whose echoing chimes invited a thronging multitude of well-dressed worshippers. "Who would have dreamed there could be such a difference in the views that may be taken of the Saviour of Mankind and the Message which ushered in the Christian Era! Can it be that he is right? Those are terrible truths which he recounts; can it be that the followers of the Christ have made Him seem to be only the friend and Saviour of the white man? Is Prime right in calling Him the "White" Christ? Will we never learn the Master's lessons? Will the rich and strong and brave who profess His name, never learn to put themselves in the place of the weak and poor and timid? Must His very name be a thing of terror and distrust to those for whom

He died? It is hard enough to be black without having the curse of eternal hopelessness added to it! It *must* be difficult to reconcile such an apparent curse with the idea of Divine mercy! And then to think, to feel, to believe, that the Christ—the divine and universal lover of humanity—to think that His church is but the cult of the wrongdoer—the oppressor! God help us! how little we know of each other's burdens and how our own acts may make heavier the load our neighbor bears! Yet what can we do? God help us—*it is a terrible problem!* ”

The good man brushed aside a tear as he went up the marble steps, and his face was very sad as he passed through the vestibule of the great church thronged with happy faces and full of the soft echoes of half-suppressed but joyful greetings. The hymns and prayers seemed full of the idea of the “White” Christ! His heart stood still with horror, even as he listened to the songs of jubilee, as he thought what would have been his own religious status had the *Man* Jesus Christ been black, and the circumstances of his life and that of Pactolus Prime been reversed. He was a good man, and tried faithfully to picture to his own mind the terrors of such a transformation. Yet how far below the fact did the wildest effort of his fancy fall!

VII.

SOME EXPERT TESTIMONY.

“WELL, Uncle,” said the man who took the commercial traveler’s place, “I am not an expert accountant, but you can’t humbug me with such figures as we’ve been having here. I know something about the facts of history, and something about niggers too; and when you come to talk about the white people of this country being indebted to the colored man, I tell you it’s all nonsense. When a nigger got his board and clothes, house and firewood, and a doctor to attend him when he was sick, he got all his work was worth, and generally a good deal more.”

“He raised what he ate, didn’t he?” asked Prime sharply.

The bystanders smiled at the evidently pertinent inquiry.

“Why, of course; all but the sugar and coffee and whisky and tobacco and things of that sort,” boastfully answered the undismayed assailant.

"And how much did the slave's sugar and coffee and 'things of that sort' average a year, do you think?" asked Prime blandly.

"Well—not a great deal, that is true," was the careless reply.

"How many masters furnished such luxuries?"

"Not so many, perhaps; though many furnished tobacco, and molasses, and most of them allowed deserving slaves to raise truck for themselves, with which to buy little things of that sort. This amounted to the same thing as providing it. You see it was the master's land they worked, the master's time they used, and the master's niggers that did the work. So you may as well say the master furnished them."

The man spoke with such positiveness as to make himself offensive to the listeners, as their countenances clearly showed. Prime did not seem to mind it, but said quietly, as he finished mixing a new supply of blacking on the marble block:

"In other words, you mean that after the bondman got through his day's work, they allowed him to use the time he otherwise might have wasted in rest or recreation—which a free man would perhaps have employed in reading, study and self-development—in cultivating a crop to buy himself the ordinary creature comforts."

"Of course," said the other with a sneer, "he wasn't sent to school!"

"No," answered Prime, "and he was prevented by law from learning anything that is taught in the schools, wasn't he?"

"Well, sometimes."

"Sometimes! Was it not a crime—a violation of the statute law—punishable as a felony, to teach him to read or write?"

"Yes, that was the law, but it was not always enforced. There were a good many who allowed their slaves to learn to read and write."

"How many slaves did you ever know who had such acquirements?"

"Well, I've heard of quite a number."

"How many have you known?—how many could you name?"

"Not many; one or two."

"I have known more than that number," said Prime frankly. "I suppose I could recall a half-dozen. I was one myself. But they were not numerous; they did not average one in a thousand—hardly two in ten thousand."

"Oh, there must have been more than that!"

"Fortunately, the matter is not left to be guessed at. There were a few, a very few, who slipped by the sentinel who stood with a flaming sword at the gate of the garden in which grew the tree of knowledge; but two years

after the close of the war it was next to impossible to find a score of grown colored men in many of the counties of a half-dozen States, who could read ten lines intelligibly. That I know; and I think it a high estimate to say that two in ten thousand of the five millions of slaves could read and write when liberated. Even these few were the result of unlawful indulgence on the part of individual masters, or of exceptional enterprise and daring on the part of the men themselves. They were unlawful trespassers in the field of knowledge, and liable to the severest punishment if their offense was discovered. If they dared acquire knowledge they were compelled to conceal and deny its possession."

"The masters could not afford to educate their slaves."

"Why not?"

"Why not!"

"Yes; why not? The free men of the North educated themselves by their own labor, didn't they? And had a surplus to invest in homes and luxuries, besides?"

"Of course."

"If an average laborer at the North could support himself and family and educate his children, besides earning a surplus for investment or luxury, why should not the men who

enjoyed the proceeds of the slave's labor have been able to afford him at least the rudiments of an education?"

"Yes," said the questioner hesitatingly, "but it was the States that educated the people of the North."

"Exactly; but the State schools were supported by the tax-payers, and the tax-payers represented the results of labor, didn't they? Then why should not a Christian State that added the labor of the slave—aye, even the slave himself, to its taxable aggregate—why should it not have educated his children?"

"Now, Uncle, what is the sense of talking in that way?" burst out the objector angrily. "You know it would not have done to educate the slaves. They would have been burning and killing the white people in no time if they had been educated. Why, man, it would have needed a regiment in every county to keep them down, and you know it. But what's the use of fussing about the matter now? Slavery is dead and gone. You are just as free as I am. What do you want to keep harping on what two-thirds of the people now living know nothing in the world about, except by hearsay?"

"If a man robbed you, I suppose you would say nothing about it?"

"Not if there were no chance for me to get

back what I had lost,—certainly not after he was dead and gone.”

“Not if you saw his children flaunting the fruits of his wrong in your face, and boasting of it every day?” exclaimed the old man, straightening up while his customer put his other foot upon the form.

“Who’s got the money the nigger earned?” angrily shouted the other, shaking his folded newspaper in the old man’s face. “Can anybody trace it? Does anybody know how much it is? Where is it deposited? In what is it invested? I am tired of these indefinite statements. If a man can prove his property, he has a right to take it, not otherwise. That is the law!”

“That is the law; but it is not equity, and our case is in equity. We do not ask to follow that which is ours, *in specie*. Our demand is for an equivalent, or a partial equivalent, for what has been wrongfully taken from us and converted to the use of the taker.”

It was Ben who spoke. Up to this time he had taken no part in the conversation, and his words were greeted with applause by most of those present.

“Well done, youngster,” said a gruff man upon whose boot the young man was at work. “You haven’t studied law for nothing; but

when one tries to apply the rules of equity to the practice of peoples and nations, I am afraid he will run foul of a good many obstacles."

"But the rules hold good though they cannot be enforced, do they not, Judge?" asked the young man respectfully.

"Oh, of course; they *must* if they are, as we are fond of declaring them to be, 'what the common reason of mankind approves as just and true.'"

"In equity then," the young man continued, "those who received the labor of our people unjustly, became trustees for us by their own wrongful act, and it is not necessary that we should follow and designate our own. The trustee *de son tort* who mingles the trust fund with his own becomes a debtor to that amount."

"True enough," said the gruff man with kindly condescension, "but where is the fund? Who is the *tortfeasor*? What estate will you subject to the slave's claim?"

"It seems to me, sir," said the young man, looking frankly up into his interlocutor's face, "that the slave's labor has gone into the national wealth—that immense aggregate we have recently seen paraded before the world's eyes with so much boastfulness—I don't know how many billions it is—and that all this is, in equity, charged with whatever sums may be necessary

to recompense our people, so far as may be, for the wrong done them in the past."

"That is a bold claim, young man," said the jurist, in a tone which of itself expressed warm commendation. "If the principles of equity could be applied to national affairs, or rather to collective relations, it is not easy to see how such a claim could be avoided. One objection would be that there is no means of making any distinction between the slaveholder or his descendants, and those who remonstrated against the injustice of slavery and opposed its continuance."

"It is the duty of *all* the people to see that the law wrongs no man, is it not?"

"Very true," said the judge affably, "but you understand that in our dual system of government the people of one State are not responsible for what the people of another State may do, except within certain limits."

"I understand that," said the young man; "at least I have tried to understand it."

"That is as near as anybody gets, my son," answered the judge, laughing. "I've been trying a long time to make out the puzzle, and am free to confess that it doesn't grow easier. I suppose it will take another hundred years to decide just where the boundary lies between state and national power and state and national

responsibility for the rights and privileges of the citizen. For myself, I must say I never approach the subject without feeling like a surveyor setting out to find a way through an unexplored wilderness."

"Of course, I don't know much about the matter, Judge," said the young man modestly, "but it seems to me that the people of all the States are estopped from denying their responsibility for slavery and, therefore, their moral liability for its results. You see slavery prevailed in every one of the original thirteen States; and although hundreds of slaves fought in the Continental armies to secure the independence of the Colonies, yet when these Colonies—these sovereign peoples if you please—came to form 'a more perfect union,' each one of them agreed that every other one might hold men in bondage, take from them every right and privilege, even to life itself, simply because they had more or less of colored blood in their veins. They stood by consenting, and—"

"Like Saul at the stoning of Stephen, eh?" exclaimed the judge. "There is something in that, certainly. But how about the new States?" he asked, seemingly desirous of drawing the youngster out.

"They derive their powers and privileges through the action of the older States, and are

morally as well as legally, subject to the same responsibility. In other words, they are only convenient extensions of the original thirteen. Now the fact that any of these States at a subsequent time abjured the doctrine of slavery and found their hands tied by the Constitution so that they were unable to interfere with it in others, does not relieve them from responsibility, because they themselves assented to this restriction of their power. They not only submitted to have their hands tied but helped to tie them."

"But, of course, you cannot hold the whole people of a State responsible for the wrong-doing of a part of them," said the judge gravely.

"Not unless the wrong is a result of some public act or neglect, but in such cases the courts frequently hold the whole responsible for the resultant injury, do they not? For instance, if a State takes a man's property, the whole body of the people is taxed to make the owner whole. So too, if property is destroyed in a riot, the municipality which did not afford sufficient protection is responsible for the damages."

"Well said, young man, well said," exclaimed the judge heartily, as he relieved the groaning chair of its burden of flesh and stepped gingerly off the platform. "Mr. Phelps has reason to be

proud of his pupil. I hope to see you at the bar very soon, sir, and do not doubt you will have occasion to express your views upon these matters more effectually when I am dead and gone."

"That isn't all," said Prime eagerly; "I ain't a lawyer like Benny, but I've thought a heap about this matter, Judge, and I reckon justice is about the same thing whether she's seen through your glasses or mine."

"Well, as she is always represented as blindfolded we may infer she is not particular about her appearance and doesn't care who sees her;—though it seems inconsistent to speak of her as a woman if that is the case," answered the judge, with humorous complaisance.

"I don't know about that," said Prime seriously. "But this is what seems to me to put an end to any such claim. They all shared in the proceeds of the wrong. It could not be otherwise, you see."

"It's a great question—a great question," responded the judge as he started to leave. "God has a strange way of keeping his accounts—the debit and credit of right and wrong between races and peoples—and settling them according to His own notions. He holds the scales between them as courts do between man and man, only a great deal steadier. Our

equity is only a faint reflection of His justice, but the procedure in the Heavenly Chancery"—he pointed upward with the fat forefinger of his left hand, an awkward but impressive gesture, and shook his great head as he glanced round upon the listeners—"the procedure up there is different from ours. There's no shuffling, and the judgments entered there are always enforced—always enforced, gentlemen!"

The little group were silent as he turned away and climbed the steps with a ponderous strength which concealed the effort it must have required. The respect which had kept others silent while he took part in the conversation, was not so much due to the exalted position which he held, as to that innate respect for his moral and intellectual qualities which has been the bulwark of the American judiciary.

VIII.

COUNTERCLAIM AND SET-OFF.

“SO you claim about ten billion of dollars. ‘for work and labor done,’ do you, Prime?” jocularly asked one who had taken no part hitherto in the conversation, “and the old judge actually drops an intimation that you have a good cause of action. Don’t believe it, old man; the most unreliable opinion in the world is that of a judge out of court. You see it takes the solemnity of an oath to bring him up to a sense of duty sufficient to impel him to carve a claim according to rule and precedent.”

“Oh, we don’t make any claim,” said Prime good-naturedly. “What’s the use of our claiming anything? Who would pay our demand if it was allowed? What white people would think it worth their while to pay any claim the Negro might have against them? The Christian idea of justice never gets across the color line. It counts it wicked to rob the strong, but no crime to mulct the weak under the form of law. Right is always white in

Christian law; so we do not claim anything—never have claimed anything. We have merely asked for justice, asked so humbly and for so little that the world has looked upon us as mere beggars by the wayside, seekers for alms rather than heirs of equal right. If the followers of Christ really believed what they profess—if they believed that He died for anybody but white men—they would never dare ask for mercy until they had tried to render justice. It is not recompense that we seek, but right. Justice to-day, pays all the debts of yesterday, and nothing else will.”

“Now see here, Prime,” said a cheery voice, as a man with an empty sleeve pinned across his breast took his seat upon the dais, “I’ve been listening to what has been said here for the last half-hour, and while I admit that you colored folks have had a hard time I’ll be hanged if you aren’t going a little too far. You don’t state the case fairly when you charge up all your wrongs against us and omit to give credit for what you have received from us.”

“If there are any credits—if the white race has done any good thing to the Negro or made any sacrifice for his sake—they are entitled to double credit,” said Prime earnestly.

“Well, just give us credit among other

things for this arm, will you?" said the other gayly, lifting up the stump to a level with the shoulder.

"That I will, Major—and mighty willingly, too," returned Prime heartily, "if you say I ought to. I remember when you lost that arm, and shall never forget how neatly you caught the sword in your left hand as it fell, and cried out, 'Come on, boys! I've always wanted to use my left hand, but it was contrary to Regulations!'"

"You see I was left-handed," said the Major, flushing with modesty under the approving glances that rested upon him after this speech. "But how did you come to see it? Were you one of the 'niggers' we captured that day?"

"No, I was one of the 'niggers' that followed you that day," said Prime with a chuckle.

"You? Why, there wasn't a nigger in the whole army that charged on Mission Ridge that day!"

"I was there, all the same," said Prime doggedly, "and wasn't twenty steps away when you fell and Sergeant Cushman caught you and started for the rear."

"I remember," said the other enthusiastically, "I had just sense enough left to think we had been repulsed. I cared a great deal more for that than I did for my wounds. Cush-

man was shot, poor fellow, and I should have been left there and bled to death, I think, if it hadn't been for the color-bearer, Smith—what was it the boys used to call him—Oh, yes—Pepper-pod—his initials were P. P., you see," he explained to the bystanders—"he was a gallant fellow! Did you know him?"

Prime answered with a nod, without looking up from his work.

"I wonder what became of him? I never saw him afterward. He was promoted, you see, and given a commission in a colored regiment before I got back."

Prime made no reply. The Major was silent for a moment, evidently thinking of the time when his life was at the climacteric.

"Whose servant were you then?" he asked after a while.

"I don't know—exactly," answered Prime, dryly.

"What the dickens were you doing up there, anyhow?"

"Well, Major, I was doing a little fighting, about that time."

"On your own account, eh? I don't blame you," said the other with a laugh.

"No, Major, I was fighting on your account just then. I was an enlisted man, and the army of the United States fought for the Union, not

for the freedom of the slave. I was a slave fighting for the Union—for *your* advantage, you see, not mine."

"Well, that followed. We gave you your freedom as soon as we got through with the Confederacy, and you ought to give us credit for it. Isn't that so, old man?"

"*Did* you give us our freedom? Was it not ours by right already?"

"Well, we stopped the other fellows from taking it from you. What's the difference?" asked the maimed veteran with a confidence that evoked nods of approval from the listeners.

"We were talking about a fair account between the Negro and the white man, Major."

"Certainly. Didn't the white man give you your freedom?"

"Didn't he first deprive us of liberty?"

"Yes, but he ought to have credit for giving it back all the same."

"In other words, having deprived us of *all* our rights for two hundred and fifty years, we became the debtor of the race as soon as they give us back a *part* of what the laws of God and nature declare to be our own. Is that what you mean, Major?"

"Really, that seems to be about the size of it, Prime," said the Major laughing, as he buttoned

his overcoat and prepared to depart, "but I never thought of it in that light. I don't see that we *can* claim much credit, *as a people*, for giving the Negro back his freedom; but there is one thing we did give you that was not yours before, and to which you had no moral or legal claim; we made you citizens of the United States."

"True," said Prime solemnly, "that is a fair credit, but how much is the right or privilege—you always boast of it as a right and then deal with it as a privilege—how much is it worth to the colored race? You gave us a *legal* right to exercise the power of the citizen—so you said at least—and then permitted its exercise to be made a matter of mortal peril to the colored man who seeks to benefit himself or his people, thereby. As a business man, Major, what would you give for the Negro's right, as a citizen, anywhere south of that river?" said Prime, nodding his head toward the Potomac.

"I'm sure I don't know, Prime," answered the Major with a shrug. "Ask me something easy."

"Is it worth more than the blood the Negro shed for the Republic, from Crispus Attucks's day until the last poor fellow who offered his life in the assertion of this new-found privilege? Remember, Major, that the Negro gave his

blood in the Revolution and two hundred thousand of the race offered their lives for the life of the Republic as willingly and as bravely even as you, in what you used to call the 'War of Rebellion!' You generally use some politer phrase now, but you know what I mean. Have they received—has the race received—from the American people more than the value of their blood?"

"Candidly, Prime," said the Major, turning toward him, "I don't believe they have—nor half that amount. But I never thought of the matter in that light before. I must come in and talk it over with you again—some day when I have more time. I want to know what you were doing at Mission Ridge, too. Good-by."

The good-natured veteran was half-way up the stairs before he had finished speaking. His hearty tone showed how community of peril,—the comradeship of battle,—fuses lives together so closely as to burn away even the barriers between black and white manhood.

IX.

"IF WISHES WERE FISHES."

"FOR my part I wish every 'nigger' could be sent back to Africa where they belong," said an elegantly dressed young man, as he flicked the ashes off his cigar and took his seat in one of the chairs.

"Now you're talking," rejoined another, a sallow, narrow-faced man with a long beard who sat scowling behind a paper he had pretended to be reading in another chair. "Here I've been waiting the best part of an hour to get my boots blacked. If the weather hadn't been so bad I'd have gone out and got it done somewhere else. I wish I had, anyhow, for I've been compelled to listen to the most disgusting tirade on the wrongs of the 'nigger' I have ever heard. I suppose this old beggar makes more money than half the white men in the city, but he aint satisfied—no nigger ever will be—it's the nature of the race—they're always wanting something they haven't earned. I go farther than you, sir, and wish there never had been a nigger in the country. We might

at least have had a Christmas then, without being compelled to listen to their complaints. I wish as Henry Clay did, that 'the foot of the Negro had never rested on American soil.' "

"Amen!" said Prime, solemnly, as he bent over the speaker's foot. This fervent response brought a laugh from the bystanders.

"'Well said, old mole,'" quoted one who seemed to be an actor, as he lighted his cigar and drew on his gloves.

"Where would you have been, I'd like to know, if that had been the case?" asked the sallow-faced man angrily, looking down upon the old man as he shot his arms back and forth each side of the boot upon the form.

"That doesn't make any difference, sir. I wish there had never been any 'niggers' here all the same," answered Prime. "In fact, I wish there had never been any colored people created."

"It's a pity the Lord didn't consult you before he made them," said the young man with a laugh.

"It certainly would have saved a heap of trouble in this country," rejoined the other, "and it would have been a heap better place for white people to live in, too. Just about all the trouble we've had has come from the 'niggers.' "

"And the Indians," suggested Prime.

"Well, yes, we've had some trouble with them—not much."

"Except the trouble of killing them," rejoined the old man.

"Yes, we've had to kill some. They couldn't expect to stand across the path of civilization and not get hurt."

"Of course not," sneered Prime as he tapped his customer's boot as a sign that his work was done, and straightening up looked him squarely in the eye, "and they couldn't expect the doctrine, 'Do unto others as you would that they should do to you,' should regulate the white man's relations with any people having a dusky skin."

"Don't quote Scripture to me, you black rascal!" exclaimed the customer as he sprang to his feet and stepped off the dais. "What would your whining, thieving race have known about Scripture or religion if the white men had not brought you to this country? Do you think the Negroes on the Congo coast are any better off than those in the United States? What you owe the white man is infinitely more than his indebtedness to you. It can't be estimated. It can only be imagined by considering the distance between the African and the American Negro of to-day. That is what you owe to Christianity and civil-

ization. Do you hear, you ungrateful black rascal?"

"Oh, I hear, sir, I hear," answered Prime, coolly brushing the gentleman's coat. "I hear, and I don't doubt you think that is the correct view. I don't deny that it was a great advantage to the colored race to be brought to this country—greater than one can well conceive. I do not doubt that God did it; but no follower of the white Christ is entitled to any credit for it. It was not done because *He* commanded it, for His glory, nor because *He* is the Saviour of men. It was not done for *our* advantage, nor as a religious duty, nor to rescue us from barbarism. It was done for the same reason that the Indian was killed—simply because it was to the white man's advantage! It was done in the name of the white Christ, and with the claim of having His sanction and approval! The white man has no more right to commendation for any good that resulted from those two centuries and a half of wrong, than had Pilate or Judas to take credit for the salvation that came through a Crucified Redeemer! You did not *mean* to do us good, and it is only *intended* results for which the white race can claim our gratitude!"

"People ought to be thankful for what good they receive in this world, whether it was intended or not," growled the other.

"Do you think so?" asked Prime. "Look at Benny there! Whom does he remind you of? Who does he look like?"

"I don't know," responded the other, carelessly glancing at the young man.

"Oh, yes, you do. You know there's but one family in the country that has those features, and you know very well what name that family bears. It's a good family; I haven't anything to say against that, and there's no doubt he'll be a smarter man for having such blood in his veins, but does he owe any gratitude to those from whom it was derived? Do *you* want to claim credit for that, sir?"

"Do you mean to insult me?" exclaimed the customer angrily, as he saw the smile that came to the lips of those who were listening. "I'll make it warm for you, you miserable black nigger! I'll tell the proprietor how you treat his guests!"

He started toward the stairs, as if to allow no time to escape before the execution of his threat.

"I don't think you will, Mr. Collins," said Prime coolly.

The customer turned sharply on his heel, and after scrutinizing the old man for a moment as he bent over the foot of another patron, asked:

"How did you come to know my name?"

"I'm no stranger to it," said Prime carelessly, sponging off the boot on which he was at work. "You didn't s'pose as great a man as you could come up North without bein' recognized, did you?" he asked, with a sarcastic grin.

"What did you mean by saying I would not tell the proprietor?" asked the other sternly.

"Wal, I thought you mightn't want him to tell you he'd rather part with you than try to get along without me," said Prime suavely. "Besides it wouldn't be a bit of use. He's known me a heap longer'n he has you, and I've known you a heap longer'n I have him, too, as it happens!"

The last words were uttered with an unmistakable sneer.

"What do you mean by that, you impudent rascal?" exclaimed the stranger, turning threateningly upon him.

"Jes what I say, Mars Ephrum!" said Prime, straightening up and facing the other defiantly. "Ain't no harm in dat, is dey? Ain't nobody gwine ter get killed fer 'spressin' his 'pinion 'bout here, is dar?"

There was an insulting leer in the words emphasized by the broad negro dialect in which they were uttered. The other paused and scrutinized the sphinx-like face before him, as if seeking to find some recognizable feature.

Prime smiled scornfully.

"Hope yer satisfied, Mr. Collins," he said with mock reverence. "Did ye think ye'd found a lost nigger?"

"Don't you fool with me, old man!" exclaimed the other, taking a step forward.

Benny, who had been carefully observant of what was going on, now left his work and stepped between the angry disputants, facing the white man.

"Aha! Stirred up de young cub, haint ye?" said Prime tauntingly. "Why don't yer hit *him*, Mr. Collins? Looks as if yer had a right ter lick him, don't he now, gentlemen?"

"There, there!" said two or three, accepting at once the rôle of peacemaker. "Don't let's have any trouble!"

"I'll see if the proprietor of this house will allow his guests to be treated in this manner!" said Collins, white with wrath, turning toward the stairway.

"I'd go easy ef I was you, Mr. Collins!" said Prime mockingly. "They hev a coroner here; an' don't have to wait till the buzzards hev picked a man's bones afore they find out he's dead! Don't be fractious, Mars Ephrum, ner fergit yer latitude! A man's apt to be more in the way atter he's dead than when he's alive, here in these parts. Ain't no swamps handy, yer know!"

The pallor of the stranger's face grew deathlike as he listened to the words the old man hurled after him. He rallied, however, and turned at the foot of the stairs to say in a mild enough voice:

"You have evidently made some mistake; I will see you again."

"God knows I hope I hev, Mahrster," said the old man with sudden emotion. Benny glanced up at his employer with a look of reverence as he resumed his work.

X.

A BASIS OF COMPOSITION.

“WHAT do you know about that man?” asked one of those who stood by.

“Nothing in the world, Mr. Hunt, and if I did it wouldn’t be worth your while to ask about it. There ain’t any need for detectives now, when a nigger disappears—not in this country! There used to be a good deal of business of that sort—profitable too—but since they’ve quit buying and selling them, it don’t pay for you detectives to track a missing nigger!”

There was a laugh at the expense of the inquirer, whose occupation was thus disclosed.

“You don’t mean to say you were shooting in the dark?” he asked.

“Well, no, not exactly,” answered Prime. “I happened to see his name on the register this morning, and he had a letter in his hand when he sat down here—that’s how I knew his given name. I remembered there was some talk about the disappearance of niggers in the place he hails from, some few years ago—that’s all.”

“Well, you made a hit,” said the detective carelessly as he strolled up the stairs.

A moment after he had introduced himself to Mr. Collins, whom he found in the reading-room, and placed his services at the disposal of that irate but worthy stranger. His proffer was accepted with alacrity, and after the payment of a liberal fee he was commissioned to do two things: first, to find out what he could about Prime and what he meant by the language he had used; second, to examine the records and learn what he could of one P. P. Smith, formerly an officer of the —th U. S. Colored Infantry. The man himself, Mr. Collins thought, was dead, but it was important for him to find his heirs.

Thereupon, the detective told him what he had learned from the boot-black after Collins had come away. The latter listened with a look of relief, and the information seemed to give him a very high opinion of the value of the detective's services, for he added of his own accord a double eagle to the fee he had already paid, and invited the detective to go down to the bar with him for a Christmas dram. Prime smiled as he saw the feet of the two pass unsteadily by his window an hour afterward.

"You ought not to take such liberties with a stranger," said a dignified-looking man who sat in Prime's chair. "Your careless remark might have ruined the reputation of a very good

man. I am, as you know, very far from being an apologist for the wrongs that have been done your race, but, fortunately, it is but a small portion of the Southern people who are responsible for, or approve of, such things."

The gentleman's tone was that of unquestioned superiority.

"No doubt you know all about the Southern people, Senator—most Northern men do," said Prime sharply, "especially those in Congress."

"I have made the matter a special study," rejoined the Senator severely. "Have you read my speeches?"

"No," answered Prime dryly, "but I have heard—parts of them."

"What do you think of them?"—eagerly.

"They seemed very wonderful to me."

"You could see that I had studied the subject thoroughly?"

"Did you hear what Professor Wryneck said in here the other day?"

"No indeed," the Senator rejoined with a smile; "something good no doubt; he is a very learned man."

"He said he had been studying the moon for forty years, and didn't know as much about it now, as a perfect stranger would know if he could just stand on its surface five minutes."

"And you think—"

"I think," interrupted Prime, "that even a 'nigger,' who studies Southern life every day he lives, at first hand and short range, is apt to know more about it than a Northern man who never gets nigh enough to it to *feel* it. There are some things, Senator, that a man can't learn from reports. He must see them, feel them, for himself!"

"But one must rely upon testimony," urged the legislator.

"No doubt, but he should hear all the testimony and hear it fairly; and then he must study the witnesses as well as the question."

"Well, we wont discuss that," said the Senator good-naturedly, "but you must admit that the bill providing for 'National Aid to Education' is a step in the right direction."

"You can't expect a 'nigger' to know much about such things, sir," answered Prime evasively.

"Oh, you can't escape in that way," laughed the Senator. "I see you don't like it. Now tell me why. You were complaining a while ago, that the country did nothing to compensate your people for enforced ignorance. Now here's a measure designed to accomplish that very thing and yet you shake your head and look dissatisfied with it. Now tell me the reason."

"Well, Senator, let me ask you candidly, *is* that the purpose of the bill?"

"Well, not professedly, of course, but incidentally—"

"Don't you think, Senator, that it is about time the country ceased to make the Negro merely an 'incident,' except when it does him injustice? There used to be no difficulty about dealing with him directly. Nobody ever held the Fugitive Slave Law unconstitutional."

"Well, this bill is intended to promote the education of all—white and black alike, according to their illiteracy. If there is an illiterate Negro, the State gets a sum certain, to be used in the education of that Negro's child or the child of some other Negro, and the same in case of an ignorant white man. It is just as fair for the one as for the other. You don't want anything more, do you? If there are more colored than white illiterates in any State, your race will get the greater share of advantage—at least until an equilibrium is produced. What more can you ask?"

"That would be good enough, if true; but it's just too good to believe, Senator," said Prime pleasantly.

"But I assure you it is all true," urged the legislator. "Can't you accept my statements?"

"I've no doubt you think so, and am sure the

bill is *intended* to do that very thing. But it's just there you've made your mistake. Any 'nigger' could tell you it won't do it. Who is to distribute and apply this money, Senator?"

"Why, the States, of course. The general government has no power—"

"I understand," interrupted Prime, "the general government is always short of power where a 'nigger' is to be benefited even 'incidentally.' Who controls the States where the Negroes are, and where the black illiterates you wish to benefit are to be found?"

"Why, the people—of course."

"Do they?"

"Well, Congress has nothing to do with that—just now, at any rate," said the Senator pettishly.

"Well, *we* have," said Prime, straightening himself up; "we have suffered injustice enough and do not care to advertise for any more. You *know* that in the States where our people equal or even exceed the whites in number, they would have no voice in the control or application of this munificent bequest, according to the plan of this bill, and you *know* that no people were ever good enough to be trusted with the interests of a powerless and subordinate race. You *say* you are giving a fair proportion of this sum to our people, and the world will hold us

responsible for proportionate progress; yet you put the fund where we cannot control it, nor any part of it, and where every principle of human nature shows you we shall not get a fair share of its benefits. You would not offer to treat us in this way if we were not 'niggers'!"

"But I assure you, Mr. Prime—"

"Just let me say one word more, Senator. You have the *Record* and the press to give circulation to your ideas. I have only the men who sit in my chairs or who are waiting for places in them, to talk to. This bill which you think such a fine thing, to my mind is only a plan for using a 'nigger's' fingers to pull chestnuts out of the treasury for the benefit of the white people of those States!"

"How can that be when one counts the same as the other—a black man just as much as a white one?" asked the Senator with evident annoyance.

"Easy enough. You haven't followed your fund—haven't traced it into the schoolhouse—or you'd see it yourself. In those States the public schools are not open to all—some are for the white race and some for the black people."

"But the bill provides that they shall be put on the same footing."

"Very true; but look at its operation. Say

a million dollars a year goes to Virginia—that's about the sum proposed, I think. Two-thirds of her illiterates are colored, but only about one-third of her population. That is true, isn't it?"

"Yes, approximately."

"Of course, I cannot give the figures as you would; but now answer me this question: Why would Virginia receive this money? Two-thirds would be given on account of colored illiteracy, wouldn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Now, where would it go?"

"Why, to the colored schools, of course."

"Let us see. How is the money distributed to the counties from the State treasury?"

"According to the population—*per capita*, as we call it."

"And how to the school districts?"

"In the same way."

"Exactly."

"Well, two-thirds of the population is white, isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Then the white schools would get two-thirds of the fund, wouldn't they?"

"I suppose so, but—"

"Hold on! Then the United States, by this bill, would give *two* dollars to cure white illit-

eracy for every *one* it gives to cure colored illiteracy, though there are *as many again* colored as white illiterates. Isn't this rather unfair even for 'incidental' justice?"

"But what would you have? We cannot undo all the wrongs of the past at once!"

"True enough, Senator; but it is better to do nothing than add a new wrong to the long category of the old ones."

"The fact that a man is black does not prove that he knows what is best for the colored race," petulantly.

"Very true, sir; but it's a universal rule that the man who wears a shoe knows best where it pinches."

"But he may not know how to mend it."

"Very likely, nor will the cobbler, until he learns just where it rubs. I know what it is *to be a 'nigger,'* Senator, and *you don't*; and you never will be able to devise an efficient remedy for our ills until you have learned *just what that means!*"

"Perhaps you are right," said the Senator in a dissatisfied tone, as he turned thoughtfully away. "It's a very difficult problem to deal with. We try to be as considerate and charitable as we can; but it seems as if the more we did for the colored man the more dissatisfied he becomes."

"Suppose you try a little justice, Senator; Charity is a good thing, but I think a pound of justice would go further than a ton of charity."

"But what *is* justice?" said the Senator. "That is the question."

"With submission, sir, I do not think that *ought* to be the question. The question ought to be 'What is *injustice*?' "

"I do not see any difference."

"Perhaps there is none; but it seemed to me that to do justice might mean to make compensation for the past, which cannot be expected; while not to do injustice, pertains only to the future and is always possible."

"But I thought you were speaking of the matter of debit and credit?"

"That was not my idea, sir. A gentleman who believes that political society is merely a business association for business purposes, to be managed on purely business principles, proposed the inquiry. So far as our people are concerned, it serves only to show that they are entitled to consideration at the hands of the American Republic — should not be treated with farther injustice, I mean."

"Well, how shall we avoid injustice in this matter? We cannot compel the Southern states to admit colored children to their white schools."

"That is very true; and if you had the power it would be folly to attempt to exercise it. Prejudice, whether right or wrong, can rarely be legislated out of existence, and the schools of the South would be valueless to the colored people if they were opened by compulsion to them."

"How, then, can we prevent the injustice of which you complain?"

"It seems to me so easy that I wonder any one should think it difficult. The fund, it is admitted, should be distributed to the States according to their illiteracy; why not distribute it direct to the counties, or school-districts, according to the same plan?"

"The States have a right to distribute the school funds as they see fit."

"Their own funds, of course; no one questions that. But a gift may be conditioned," interposed Benny, "and you have already attached conditions to this gift looking to its forfeiture in case of non-compliance."

"That is true," said the Senator.

"It seems to me," said Prime, "very easy and very natural to go a little farther. What is the purpose of the act?"

"Why, to promote education."

"I thought it was to prevent or cure illiteracy."

"Are they not the same things?"

"Not in this case: It is claimed, and with some show of reason, that the Nation has no right to provide schools or education for the sake of the individual. I have heard the matter discussed a good deal, for I always go to the Capitol when it is coming up. Of course, the argument cannot be sustained by the history of the government. You have them there. Education as a personal advantage—an individual luxury, so to speak—has been aided and promoted in many States—all of them, in fact, by National grant. But in this case, I take it, it is the necessity of the government, rather than the advantage of the citizen, that is to be considered. In other words, the government proposes to provide for the enlightenment of the citizen for the same reason that it builds forts and ships, prepares charts and constructs levees,—simply in order that the Republic may derive benefit thereby—may receive no damage from their ignorance."

"Of course: the government proposes to aid in the education of the citizen because it makes him a more valuable element of the National life," said the legislator, with sententious positiveness.

"Is it not rather that he may be a less dangerous element? Does not the whole theory of

National aid to education rest on the idea that the ignorant voter is a source of actual peril—less likely to know what he ought to do and quite powerless to do even what he may perceive ought to be done?”

“Of course, there is something in that.”

“Is not that the real ground of the Nation’s right to interfere? Has not the Nation the right, in order to provide for the ‘general welfare of the United States,’ to declare that every man who holds a ballot shall be enabled to read it? And is not this the sole ground of National aid to common schools—not to educate the citizen for his own advantage, but to disarm the ignorant voter for the general advantage?”

“Certainly,” said the Senator, graciously, “that is one reason; but it is also good policy from the other point of view. An educated citizen is a better, a more profitable ingredient of society than the ignorant one can be.”

“To the State he may be: to the United States, I cannot see that it makes any appreciable difference. The Nation does not regulate morals nor provide for individual efficiency or success. It would, no doubt, be a good thing if every man were compelled to master some trade or manual calling, but the Nation has no power to provide that they shall be

so taught. The Nation has, however, an undoubted right to provide for its own safety, and in a republic, safety may very often depend on the ability of the voter to read and write. The purpose of National aid to education in the various states, therefore, is simply to cure illiteracy."

"Well, suppose it is? How does that affect the plan of distribution of the fund?"

"In this way, as it seems to me. The Nation says to the State, after taking a census of its people: Fifty-one per cent. of your voters are unable to read or write. This is a dangerous state of affairs. Now, I will give two dollars apiece for each one of your illiterate population, in order to help cure this evil. But, in order that I may feel assured that the fund will be applied to this specific purpose and in the most effective way, I must attach certain conditions to the grant. First, the remedy must be applied directly to the disease. In one-half your territory there is no illiteracy. Now this fund must not be applied to schools in that part of the State, but must be applied to each county in proportion to its illiteracy, and in each school-district according to its illiteracy."

"That would not be a bad idea," said the Senator thoughtfully.

"You must remember, sir," continued the old man, "that in this respect the South is not like the North. The country counties of the North are by far the more intelligent—have less illiteracy, I mean. At the South, it is just the other way; the cities have a smaller proportion of illiterates than the country."

"Are you sure of that?"

"You have only to examine your own figures to prove it. If you were acquainted with the South, you would not need any figures. The result of the system proposed by the bill as it stands, you see, would be to give the counties where there was the smallest proportion of illiteracy the largest proportion of aid for their schools."

"It does seem so, indeed."

"The futility of this plan is seen all the more readily when you apply it to the two races. Two-thirds of the fund would be given because two-thirds of the illiterates are colored, but two-thirds of the whole population are white. That is, under, the present plan the government would give to Virginia, say two dollars in aid of education, for every illiterate white or black. Now two-thirds of the illiteracy being black and two-thirds of the population white, if the State distributes this fund *per capita*, not only will the more intelligent counties get the larger

proportion, but the white schools will get *two* dollars for each white illiterate and the colored schools only *one* dollar for each colored illiterate."

"Oh, that cannot be!" exclaimed the Senator.

"I have never believed that was what your co-workers desired, but that is certainly the result of the bill to which you refer. That is why I said it was unjust."

"And how would you remedy that injustice?"

"Simply by providing that the fund should be distributed to the counties, or better still to townships, according to the number of illiterates in each, and wherever separate schools for the two races are maintained, every dollar granted on account of white illiteracy should be applied in aid of white schools, and every one granted on account of colored illiteracy should be applied to the maintenance of colored schools."

"That would seem to be feasible and just."

"That would not be *unjust*," answered Prime. "If the National government will not distribute this fund directly to the schools as is done with the Peabody Fund, which would be much the cheaper, safer, and more effective method, let it at least save our people the mockery of using

their past wrongs as a cloak and an excuse for fresh ones."

"But your people, hundreds and thousands of them, have asked for this very measure which you denounce."

"So they have, sir; can you blame them? Did you ever see the inside of a prison-pen during the war, in which men had been kept on half-rations for months?"

"I never had that privilege," said the Senator coolly, "and I do not think any good can come from alluding to such things."

"It's easy to forget another's suffering. But I'm not blaming anybody. It don't make any difference whether it was right or wrong, necessary or unnecessary, so far as my point is concerned. You say you never had that 'privilege.' Well, I did, and counted it a real privilege, strange as that may seem. It is the grandest thing I ever knew—those men who did not know who might see the morning, singing in quivering tones as the sun went down: 'As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free!' Perhaps that is why I haven't forgotten it. But what I want to say is, that I suppose you won't deny that a company of those prisoners of war,—educated white men, you know,—were as good judges of what they needed and ought, in common

right, to receive as the average colored man?"

"Why, of course," irritably. "What is the use of asking such a question?"

"Don't be angry, sir; I mean no offense. What I want to say, is merely that no one who has seen some thousands of men who have hardly had a full meal for months at feeding-time, will ever forget the ravening fierceness with which they fought and scrambled for even the crumbs and shreds of food that fell upon the ground in the distribution of their meager supply."

"Very naturally, I should suppose," said the legislator.

"Of course; but would any one claim that, because men were eager to get the scraps, they thought these were all they required."

"Certainly not."

"Well, that is the way with the colored people. They have been starved so long and are so eager for knowledge that they are willing and glad to get even the scraps they hope they may receive by this measure. Besides, a good many of them have despaired of anything like justice. They say the nation will never do anything for education unless it gives the white man two dollars for every one given to the 'nigger.' So they say, 'Give us the scraps!'

There are a good many more who actually believe the claim which has been so assiduously put forth, that nothing more *can* be done; they have come to believe the argument made solely for the purpose of depriving them of the advantage while pretending to accord them right, that if the nation gives a dollar toward the enlightenment of the people it must allow each State to declare just how the portion assigned to its people shall be applied. They think they cannot get anything better, and so say: 'Even half a loaf is better than no bread.'"

"You do not believe the advocates of this measure are sincere, then?"

"I do not question that, at all; but they do not recognize the fact that this is a matter of right rather than one of sentiment. If there were no question of color in it, there would be no difficulty about distributing the fund to the schools of each township. It is a method, simple, cheap, equitable, and makes any complication with State authority impossible. But the trouble is, it gives just as much for each colored illiterate as for each white illiterate; and the only way to avoid that just and righteous division of the fund, if this plan were adopted, would be to open the schools of a State to both races. But the

people of the South say, in effect: 'Such a thing cannot be thought of,—we would rather have no schools at all. The schools are ours; we are willing to let the 'nigger' have what *we* think he needs, and what we can afford. We have taken his labor to educate our sons and daughters for two hundred years and are willing to be liberal with him now; but it wont do to have him think that he has a right to control his own schools, or have any more for their support than we see fit to give him. This is our right; this is necessary to enable us to control the 'nigger.' So if the National government wants to contribute toward the cure of illiteracy among the 'niggers,' it must put two dollars into white schools for every one that goes into colored schools, and admit our right to control the application of *that one!*'

"And you would admit this claim rather than put yourself in the attitude of demanding justice for the Negro, or have the government recognize the fact that he is entitled to be justly treated. That is all there is of it. You know it is not right, but you make yourself the instrument of wrong,—this unnecessary and inexcusable wrong,—simply because you believe the people of the North will never consent that justice shall be done the Negro as long as the white man of the South desires to

hold him in subjection. Having made him a voter, you refuse not only to protect him in the exercise of that right, but are unwilling even that he should learn to protect himself."

"You have a poor opinion of Northern sentiment. You should remember what Northern charity has done for your race," said the Senator sternly.

"No colored man can forget it, sir," said the old man fervently. "It is the conscience of a great people, rebuking the sycophancy of a great nation. The charity of the North is as boundless as its faith. It is its want of justice of which we complain. Its 'long-suffering kindness' is inexhaustible, so long, especially, as somebody else does the suffering, and it is only required to be kind. It does not think it very hard for the Negro to suffer injustice,—he is used to it, you see; but they think it would be very hard upon the white people of the South to be compelled to treat the Negro justly, or even to see him receive justice from the Nation,—for they are *not* used to that. So the very same charity that pities our weakness, becomes the shield and excuse for farther injustice."

"There may be something in that," rejoined the Senator musingly.

"Perhaps I am a little hot against the North

in this matter, because there seems no reasonable motive to excuse its course. I can understand the motive of a Southern white man in opposing National Aid to education in any form, and especially in a form that would do justice to the Negro or decrease in any degree his dependence on the Southern white man. He wants to keep him a menial. He is profitable in that position, and the degree of profit depends on his helplessness. He has the same interest in keeping him dependent that the slaveowner had in slavery,—it means cheap labor, and cheap labor means profit. The South would never have rebelled if it had not been for the profit there was in slavery. It may have been unprofitable to the State,—bad policy for the people,—but for the man who owned the slave, it was a good thing. But for this, not a shot would ever have been fired to save it from extinction. I can understand such a motive and, in a sense, excuse it. But I can see no reason why the North should be unwilling to do plain and simple justice to the Negro except the mere fact of his color; I do not believe there *is* any other."

"I cannot agree with your ideas, in regard to this 'great National charity,' " said the Senator as he started to go, "but I must admit there is a good deal of force in what you say."

“Don’t call it charity, please,” said Prime, gazing earnestly after him. “It is a great defensive policy on which the peace and welfare of the United States are certain some time to depend.”

XI.

THE FEET OF TWO ADMINISTRATIONS.

IT was past noon, and the crowd that had thronged the bootblack's stand in the basement of the "Best House" all the morning had disappeared. Pactolus Prime had counted up his morning's receipts. His assistant had been out for the luncheon which he always took at a modest "dairy" upon the side street, where the clerks from the Treasury go to get a glass of "pure country milk," to wash down the "snacks" they bring from home. Returning, he had swept the floor; examined the brushes and filled some of the bottles out of a larger one in another drawer; in short, put the stand in order. His employer sat in one of the customer's chairs, now turned so as to face the window, watching the people or rather the feet, that went by. The young man took a book out of one of the drawers and sat down on the edge of the dais. One who was versed in such matters would have known at a glance that it was a law book, though it had been carefully covered with heavy brown paper, either to disguise its character or to pre-

vent its becoming soiled. He opened it and allowed the leaves to fly back as they slipped through his thumb and finger, noting regretfully one chapter after another, and stopping now and then to read a few lines. At last he closed the volume and looked resolutely up at his employer. The old man had been very nervous and excited all the morning. He looked very weary now as he watched the feet of the passers-by and commented to himself in an undertone upon their possessors. He had coughed a good deal, too, and the assistant's look showed the anxiety he felt, as he scanned his master's face.

"Mr. Prime," he said at length.

"What is it, boy?" answered the other, not removing his eyes from the thronging feet upon the pavement, and continuing the comments he had been making to himself in an undertone. "I think I never saw so many badly shod people on a Christmas here in Washington in my life, Benny. It's hardly two months since the election, you see, and only two more to a change of administration. There's lots of clerks who gave one or two months' wages to keep the party in power, and they will have to pinch and starve to get even before they are turned out; and the very first place they begin to economize—they and their families—is

in their shoes. Nine out of ten of them black their own boots now, because they are ashamed to let a professional see the condition of their footgear. The Congressmen who were defeated, too, are perfectly reckless about their appearance. None of them have their wives here this winter. No woman ever wants to go to Washington for a last term. Well, things will begin to hum about February. I shall have to put on one or two more hands if there is an extra session. I wonder where I shall get them?"

"If you please, sir, I think I should like to stay."

"What! I thought you wanted to be a lawyer," said Prime, turning sharply on his assistant.

"Mr. Prime," answered the young man, "I want to do what is best for our race—that's what we ought all to think of now, before anything else—and I am sure you know what that is better than I."

"Every one to his trade, Benny. I was made for a bootblack, you see—or thought I was until to-day. Never made a customer mad before in my life. It's been a good business, too. I've made money at it, Benny, more than people think. In the whole time I've been here, the poorest month I've had has netted me more than a hundred dollars, and

I have gone as high as four hundred clear, in thirty days. It's brought chances, too, that have been worth more than the business, and I haven't neglected them. I thought if I made money, perhaps I might get to be something more than a 'nigger.' But 'taint no use, Benny."

"That's mother's notion, too," said Benny with a sigh, "she says it's no use to try and get rid of the taint—that a single drop of colored blood will curse forever."

"Well, it is not an easy thing to shake off, even for one as white as you."

"I've found that out."

"Already?"

"Long before I came here: I wanted to be a cash-boy, you know."

"In a store, yes: nice place, and you as neat, well-mannered a lad as could be found in the city. Well-educated and good-tempered, too,—just the kind of boy for such a place."

"They seemed to think so—till they heard mother was a colored woman, or so considered by some of our neighbors."

"And they wouldn't take you?"

"Turned me off, sir; said it wasn't the color but the name."

"Nigger?"

"Of course."

"They were right, Benny; you must be a white man."

"I hate the very thought."

"Don't say that, Benny. Take the world as it comes. It's kicking at what can't be helped that makes most of the trouble in the world. You're white. You are not responsible for it; and can't change the fact, but you are responsible for the use or misuse you make of it. The question is whether you will give your children the advantage of being regarded as superior beings to whom all opportunities are open, or leave them to struggle with the same difficulties that confront you."

"But don't you think there will be any change, Uncle Pac? Don't you think the good Christian men and women who have done so much to enlighten our people, will see that there cannot be peace and prosperity and true Christian feeling without equality of opportunity?"

"That's a hard question, Benny. Christianity is a very flexible idea. It is a religion that runs with popular thought and adapts itself to popular prejudices. It does not rule but follows; I mean Protestantism, of course. What the best people of a nation prefer, that it is. As a noted divine has recently said, 'It is the religion of respectability; it has no welcome for rags

and grime—only pity and alms.’ Now, black is not a respectable color. That is all there is of it, Benny. Every white man is afraid other white men might think less of him if he recognized the Negro as an equal. They don’t even think his name worth a capital letter; the poorest printer puts it all in ‘lower-case.’ This feeling is not likely to change in a good many years—perhaps not in a good many centuries, and you cannot afford to wait.”

“It seems like deserting my race,” said the boy, ingenuously.

“That is because you think of yourself as a nigger—the poison has entered your own veins. I do not mean that you think any less of yourself—in fact I believe you are a little proud of it. I don’t know that you have any reason to. Thus far, it’s been a misfortune to be black or brown or yellow—or for that matter anything but white. It’s a misfortune to you that some of your mother’s forebears were black: and it’s your good fortune that others of your progenitors were white. Now, what you’ve got to do is to forget your mother’s side of the family-tree. It won’t be hard to do. The slave had no family. Perhaps it’s just as well. Generations of bondage might as well be forgotten; there is no honor in them. Your mother knows, perhaps, her mother’s

name,—Parthenia or Elvira, or whatever it may have been,—possibly her grandmother's, though it's not likely. She may have had a brother or a sister, but there is no paternal side to her pedigree. She had no father, neither her mother nor her mother's mother for two hundred years at least. Christianity did not allow the slave to have a father. It was an offense against good morals for a white man to be illegitimate, a nobody's son, but Christian law provided expressly that every slave should bear this added infamy as a badge of the greater wrong of bondage, and the Christian church permitted and endorsed this wholesale wrong, simply because they were niggers. It upheld slavery as a divine institution especially designed for the benefit of the colored man, and rigidly forbade marriage to the slave lest he should gain a pride of ancestry or build thereon a claim of right. It was done, simply because Christianity does not demand or require that its followers should do justice to other men if they happen to be 'niggers.' It was a terrible wrong, but is that any reason why the children of the victims should refuse to take advantage of its benefits? God has so ordered events that the worst wrongs sometimes bring advantage to the oppressed. Slavery made your mother the victim of a master's lust.

You did not inherit his name, but no human law can prevent the transmission of qualities."

"I hate the very thought of him," said Benny hotly.

"Don't say that, my child. It's natural that the children of those who have been wronged should hate the oppressor; but no good will come from indiscriminate hatred of the white man by the Negro. The one advantage that the Negro has over all other races is that he can wait longer for his rights and gather more strength from adversity while he waits, than any other. We are the answer of Samson's riddle, 'Out of the eater came forth meat; out of the strong came forth sweetness.' American slavery would have killed any other race, but we gathered civilization and strength from it. Those who held us in bondage did not mean it for our good, but we should not forget to be grateful to that divine power which brought us good out of intended evil."

"Do you mean to say, that I ought to be grateful to the author of my mother's shame?" said the young man angrily.

"Well; it's a good deal better for you than if your father had been a colored man," said Prime, with an expressive shrug.

"How can you say that?"

"It's not a pleasant doctrine: there is noth-

ing high-sounding or flattering to our ideas of propriety about it; yet a million facts prove it to be true. I have no doubt God intended these things for our advantage. Perhaps the Christ—the true Christ, not the white Christ whose worship is tainted with apology for lust and greed—meant thereby to teach those who would condition His grace and prescribe the method of its operation and extension, that He is, after all, no respecter of persons, and will make even their pride and sin to minister to His mercy and love.”

“You are a strange man,” said the assistant wonderingly. “One would think, sometimes, that you were an enemy of everything like religion, and then again your words are more solemn than another’s prayer.”

“I am an enemy of everything that calls itself religion, which lifts one man above another in earthly privilege or opportunity—which separates between the rich and the poor, between the black and the white. God can have but one people, one church, one measure of right for all. Whatever else there may be is of the devil!”

“Yet you would have us grateful for these very things.”

“The devil often builds the ladder by which truth climbs up. I would not have you throw

away advantages because they happen to have come to you in a way you do not approve. It is not only a privilege to be white, but it's a decided advantage to belong to such a family as you spring from."

"You know my father?"

"I know the family, child. Most everybody that knows the country does, for that matter. They've always been noted for having their own way—being always in the lead—and especially for their ability to get and hold money. They have always been rich and always will be, I reckon. They grew rich in slave times and freedom hasn't made them poor. The fact that you've got that blood in your veins makes it certain that you'll succeed, if you don't let the stubbornness you inherit with it, spoil your chances."

"But can't I do something for the race?" asked the young man with pathetic earnestness.

"As a white man you can do more than a thousand colored men. It is *white* sentiment, white civilization, white Christianity that needs to be modified. The colored race asks no special privilege, no peculiar consideration, no distinctive favor. If equality of right, privilege and opportunity is secured to them, they desire nothing more. If this is not secured they will, some time, grow sullen, resentful and

dangerous. In this coming warfare of opinion you may be a much more important factor as a white than as a colored man. At all events you have it in your power to lift one family from the gulf of despair. If every one could do as much, the race-problem would soon be solved."

"How did you come to have such thoughts—so different from others?" asked the young man.

"I have had a different experience, I suppose," answered Prime, meditatively gazing out of the window, "an experience to give a man new ideas if not strange ones. I saw—I tried once, to help in the lifting up of a race and securing its rights. Since that I—I have been content to help individuals. It's all I can do—being a nigger—and perhaps I owe something of my power to do even this to the same forces which make you capable of doing more."

"How do you think I might be able to accomplish any good, in this direction?"

"I can't tell, Benny. I've quit trying to guess *how* things will come about or even saying *how* they ought to be done. Any man can decide, if he will think a little, *what* ought to be done, in any given state of affairs; but *how* it may be accomplished—Ah, that is God's part of the riddle! And he works it out,

sometimes with blessings, but quite as often with curses. It is the curse he visits on the wrong-doer that ripens into blessing on the head of the helpless victim. Anybody who will sit down and study calmly what he sees to-day, can prophesy with a good deal of certainty what will come out of it sooner or later; but when it will come, or how it will come, only a fool will try to guess. The essential equality in right, power, privilege and opportunity of the Negro in America is sure to be established. When or how nobody knows. It may be within a generation; it may take a decade of centuries. It may be by reason; it may be by force. It may be by a change of Christian ideals; it may be by a message from heaven written in blood. Perhaps if I had had your advantages and been as white as you, I might have known more or done better in my day."

A half-sneer curled the thin lips as he spoke.

"Oh, Mr. Prime!" said the young man reproachfully, "don't talk like that! You know I ain't fit to black your boots!"

"Well, you've done it times enough," answered the old man cheerfully, "and that reminds me that one of them hasn't been only about half-shined to-day. You may as well give it a touch now."

He wheeled round and put his foot on the

rest while Benny completed his morning's interrupted task.

"What's that you say?" he exclaimed, presently, turning to a messenger boy who inquired for him. "Something for me? Hand it here!"

He took a note from the boy; tore it open; glanced at its contents and sprang to his feet.

"Never mind it, Benny; I must go—right away—right away. Hand me my coat—not that one—yes, you may, too! You're a good lad, Benny, and I'll stand by you."

He took his hat and stick, dragged his lame leg to the foot of the stairs, came back and said to the young man in an intense whisper:

"Remember, Benny, whatever happens you are to be a lawyer, and a *white* lawyer too!"

Before the young man could answer, Prime had hobbled up the stairway and made his way through the crowded office to the door. The young man stood half-dazed by what he had heard, until the sound of his employer's cough came to his ears as he descended the hotel steps into the street. Then he picked up his law book, sat down on the dais—he never sat in the chairs, customers did not like it, he thought—opened it, but had hardly read a word when, half an hour later, a patron roused him from his reverie by a demand for his services.

XII.

AN UNSATISFACTORY CLIENT.

“IS there anything wrong, Mr. Phelps?”

It was Pactolus Prime who asked the question as he entered the spacious office on the door of which was the modest sign, “Willard Phelps, Attorney.” The lawyer, whose acquaintance we have already made, was its only occupant. The clerks were absent and their desks were closed. Only the self-employer labors willingly on Christmas. The hat and gloves lying on the baize-covered table desk at which he usually sat, showed that even the presence of the proprietor was meant to be but temporary. The disciples of Themis are scrupulous about the observance of holidays—as well as other legal duties. Sitting before the open grate, from which the blower had but recently been removed, the lawyer shielded his face from the ruddy glow of the mass of anthracite with his left hand, as he waved his visitor toward a chair with a slight movement of the right. There was a shade of annoyance on his

brow as he answered the inquiry with brief decisiveness:

"Just as I told you!"

"She wont take it?" asked Prime anxiously, as he seated himself with the sidling movement made necessary by the peculiar deformity of his right leg. He held his hat in his hand in a way to show the pathetic dependency of habit that seems to be the inevitable inheritance of slavery. "You say she wont take it, sir?" he repeated with plaintive importunity.

"Not under those conditions."

"You explained to her, I suppose, that—that it was her father's property, and that the—the conditions were in accordance with his desire?"

"I did my best to convey that impression, Prime. I am not accustomed to lie, and may not have succeeded very well. I told her I was so informed; that was as far as I could go."

"Of course—of course," rejoined Prime eagerly, as the lawyer paused, "and she—what did she say?"

"Just what any good girl would, of course."

"Yes?"—assented Prime inquiringly.

"That she did not care for wealth under those conditions."

"You don't say?" exclaimed the old man with unconscious exultation in his tone. "Didn't take any time to think about it?"

"She did not seem to require any," said the lawyer, his countenance relaxing as if he found the idea amusing.

"Did she ask any questions—seek any explanations?"

"She wanted to know whether this P. P. Smith, who claimed a paternal interest in her, was alive, and whether she could see him?"

"And you—you told her—what?" asked the old man anxiously.

"I told her I inferred that he was alive, but that he desired to keep his identity a secret—for the present at least."

"Yes?"

"Then she wanted to know where he was—if I had ever seen him—and asked half a dozen other questions interspersed with remarks not at all complimentary either to me or my client."

"And you told her—?"

"I told her that I had not the honor of the gentleman's acquaintance," answered the lawyer bluntly.

"But you showed her the picture—gave her the commission, and informed her that—that he was a respectable man and of good family?"

"I showed her the papers—left them with her in fact—and told her I believed he was a man of considerable wealth—as indeed the deeds showed."

"And then—?"

"She wanted to know why he did not come himself and do his own errand, instead of sending an attorney. You ought to remember she is not a child, Prime," said the lawyer almost irritably.

"But you explained to her that there were circumstances—that it was necessary—" stammered the client.

"I told her the deeds were genuine—that much I felt able to assure her. As to why her father chose an agent in communicating with her, I could not tell the truth and so attempted no explanation. I did say I presumed he had a motive which was sufficient for him and consequently for me."

"And—and—what then?"

"She naturally wanted to know why he had waited so long before recognizing her claim upon him?"

"You told her he had always provided for her?"

"I said I was so informed," answered the lawyer dryly.

"Well, how did she receive that?"

"Like a queen; said she was glad to know something creditable about him."

"But you told her he was a brave soldier—was promoted for gallantry, and—and—all that?"

"I called her attention to those facts."

"That must have gratified her."

"She smiled contemptuously, and said she had never supposed *her father* could have been a coward!"

"But she took the deeds?" interrupted the old man, eagerly.

"I left them with her."

"It's all right then; the property is hers; that is a delivery, isn't it; the rest will come."

"Well, I don't know about that. She said she would never wear the name except long enough to transfer the property to her Uncle Pac, who has been more than a father to her, and authorized me to tell the man claiming to be her father, that unless she was openly acknowledged and given leave to do as she chose in regard to you, she would petition the court to have her name changed to yours and publicly avow herself your daughter!"

"But she can't do that—that—that would be ruin!" exclaimed Prime, leaning forward anxiously. "You wont let her do that, Mr. Phelps?"

"She is not a person to be easily managed, Prime. You know I advised against any subterfuge at first. Now that her suspicions are aroused, it will be difficult to deceive her further."

"Her suspicions!"

"Yes; she inquired flatly whether I knew anything about her mother."

"You told her she was dead."

"I told her that I had been so informed."

"Certainly—that was right—quite right."

"And then she asked me if I could tell her anything about herself—who she looked like, you know?"

"Of course you could not."

"I did not, at any rate."

"That satisfied her, I suppose?"

"It didn't seem to; she asked me point-blank if I had any reason to suppose her mother was of colored blood."

"Of colored blood! you told her no, of course."

"I told her I had no knowledge on the subject."

"How do you suppose she came to ask such a question?" asked Prime in an anxious tone.

"Something you had said years ago, which she remembered, seemed to have awakened a suspicion of that sort."

"I wonder what it could have been?"

"I am sure I don't know. You remember the adage about 'little pitchers.' This is not the only thing she seems to have remembered of that time. She wanted to know if the

officer—the man whose photograph you sent—was not somehow related to you?”

“That’s likely—” said Prime with an uneasy laugh. “Looks like me, don’t it? Did she think he was a ‘nigger’ too?”

“She said she had seen the portrait before—or one like it—in your possession.”

“Of course—what could be more natural?”

“She remembered what you said about it, too.”

“What was that?”

“She did not tell me—but she said enough to lead me to understand that she had listened to more than one of your diatribes on the status of the colored race, and had fully made up her mind as to what she ought to do.”

“And what is that?”

“She thinks she is somehow connected with that unfortunate people; but whether she is or not, she feels certain that you have supported, cared for and educated her, and she is determined that where you are, she will go. In the words of Ruth, she is ready to say, ‘Your people shall be my people and your God my God.’”

“But I am a ‘nigger’!” said the old man bitterly.

“And she believes herself your daughter.”

“My daughter! But that is impossible! Look at me! Is it likely that beautiful young

lady could be my child? You told her it was absurd, of course?"

"You can argue the case with her yourself, Prime; but I doubt if mere physiological argument will prevail. Women reason with their hearts, you know. She does not stop to inquire how it can be, but simply believes that it is. I told her I knew nothing about the matter, and, therefore, could have nothing to say about it. I said farther that I had been given to understand that her parents had separated on account of some difference, and that you had acted as her father's agent in this matter."

"But you should have reasoned with her—convinced her! I'm glad she don't want to forget me; but she must be content to know that I am not likely to suffer; she must cut loose from me though! The very suspicion of any relationship with me would ruin her—ruin her forever! Tell her so, Mr. Phelps—tell, her I say so—tell her it must be so!"

The old man spoke with great excitement, pulling off his glasses to wipe the sweat from his face. The lawyer regarded him attentively for a moment; rose and turned the key in the door, and returning to his seat, said:

"You may tell her what you choose yourself, Prime, but as for me—"

"Don't say that!" interrupted the old man—"don't, Mr. Phelps, don't! You've always been my friend. Don't say you wont stand by me now! Don't say you wont help me. You've known me a long time. Did you ever know anything bad of me? Haven't I been a man—a man among men—if I am black? Did you ever know me to lie or do anything mean? You know how I love her—you know I only want to secure her happiness! Don't say you wont help me!"

The old man's petition was like a wail of despair. He grasped the lawyer's hand and seemed about to go down on his knees before him.

"I do esteem you, Prime," answered the lawyer, preventing this purpose by extending his hand; "not many men whom I have known have shown either the ability or integrity you have displayed. You have not always taken my advice. I have warned you against the mystery you have persisted in maintaining about yourself. I do not wish to pry into your secrets, and have no doubt you think you are doing right; but I cannot consent to advise about a matter in which I am uninformed, or take the responsibility of countenancing a course which may be fraught with misery to another, when I do not know the facts. It has long been evident to me that you are laboring under some

•

morbid sentiment, if not actual delusion in regard to this matter. You know I am well aware that this property does not belong to this man, Smith—if indeed the man himself is not a myth.”

“But Mr. Phelps, I assure you it does—I swear to you—”

“There, there, Prime,” said the lawyer firmly, “do not make any such protestations. I have not been your counsel for fifteen years not to know to whose thrift and sagacity the accumulation of this property is due. We came here about the same time. I was a lawyer in good practice: you a boot-black on the street. I had everything in my favor: you everything against you: I have watched your course in the acquisition of this estate; I have seen your wise forecasting of events—a forecast that not seldom outran my judgment. It has given me pleasure even to be outdone, for I have felt that you were demonstrating the capacity of your people and doing more than any stranger could, to determine their future. After a time this man Smith began to buy lots in Washington. You acted for him. Now he is rich, he could buy me out two or three times over. You want I should believe that he did it all. I decline. I say you made this fortune, and I don’t believe in Smith!

"You know my feeling in regard to your race. Sympathy and sentiment are well enough, but, say what we will, money is the secret of success, and the power to make money the test of merit. The ladder on which your race must rise has golden rounds. When they become the owners of railroads they will be able to travel first-class anywhere. As soon as they own the majority of acres in any State, they will control its legislation. Power is regulated by the dollar-mark; so are privilege and esteem. That is the law of our civilization. That is why I was anxious to see you come out from under the cover of this name and acknowledge your own success. You may have been under obligations to the father of this girl. It is possible that this Smith, in whose name you have bought lot after lot until he is accounted one of the largest property-holders of the District—I say it is possible he may have aided you at first—but I do not believe it. You know I am the attorney of the bank in which you have always kept your account, and though the checks with which the purchases were made have generally been in my name, I know that the account of Pactolus Prime has been behind them, and that account has been the foundation of this fortune. I know, too, that this fortune did not begin to develop until

your bank-account showed a snug balance in your favor, made up at first by weekly, and afterward by daily, deposits of your earnings. I have protested against this, and tried to protect you and those you desire to benefit from possible loss thereby; but I will go no farther. You may have good reasons for what you have done, but I will not be a party to such deception longer, unless I know what those reasons are. You must either confide in me fully, or get some one else to act for you."

"'Taint no use, Mahster Willard—'taint no use!" pleaded the old man. "You couldn't change things if you tried—nobody can't change them! God couldn't do it unless he first changed the color of my skin. 'Taint money, Mr. Phelps—money makes a white man, that's true: but even money can't help a 'nigger': he's nothing but a 'nigger,' no matter how rich. The only thing for him to do is to get to be white or pretend to be white. If he can't do either, he must hide behind a white man's name. If you knew all there is to tell, you'd say I couldn't have done any different."

"That may be, Prime, but I must know it all before I say anything more. If you cannot trust me—"

"Don't say that, Mahster Willard—"

"Why do you call me that? You never did

before; don't do it again," said the lawyer with some irritation. "If there is any bit of Scripture the colored man should construe literally, it is the command to "Call no man Master." You ought not to perpetuate even the language of slavery—much less its spirit."

"I wont, Mr. Phelps, I wont; but don't intimate again that I don't trust you or that you wont help me. I'll tell you everything you choose to ask. I can't do any more. Just ask me what you want to know and I'll answer truly: I will Mr. Phelps—only don't ask anything you don't need to know—*please* don't!"

XIII.

A PUZZLED COUNSELLOR.

A LONG conversation between counsel and client ensued. The lawyer's questions were keen and pertinent; the client seemed to shrink from them as from the edge of a knife, yet he answered, unwillingly sometimes, but clearly. When it was over he seemed to have aged a score of years.

The lawyer rose and walked back and forth across the room, his hands clasped behind his back, a furrow stretching from side to side above the gray, overhanging brows, beneath which the blue eyes looked pityingly down upon the bent and relaxed figure in the chair. Pactolus Prime's hat had fallen to the floor; his long, thin hands feebly grasped the arms of the chair, out of which his form seemed inclined to slip. The knitted black cap lay upon the floor beside him, and the great silver-rimmed spectacles, held by one bow, dangled from his left hand. The sharp-lined countenance, narrowing from the wide, high brow to the pinched-up mouth and pointed chin, with the mobile

nostrils swelling and contracting, formed a curious contrast with the even blue-gray color of the smooth, hairless poll. His eyes were fixed upon the grate, and his attitude was one of utter despair. His countenance had lost its boldness and retained only its sharpness, incongruity, and even more pathetic hopelessness. He coughed frequently.

The lawyer glanced at him furtively as he passed and re-passed, biting his lip and giving his massive head an almost imperceptible shake each time, as if he found it impossible to reconcile two trains of thought which were passing through his mind. Picking up a small photograph from the table, he glanced from it to the shrunken figure in the chair. The frown grew deeper on his brow and he shook his head more positively still, as he went to the window and looked out upon the avenue. The storm had died with the advancing day, but a sharp, dry wind swept the streets on which the winter sun looked down with chill, glittering radiance. But no sort of weather can deprive the Christmas festival of cheerfulness. The sidewalks were crowded with chattering throngs whose garments the wind tossed recklessly about, while the sun lighted up the bright colors and flashed back from folds of satin and points of jet. Rich equipages rolled almost noiselessly

along the smooth concrete pavement; gay greetings passed back and forth between their occupants and the bustling tide upon the sidewalks. The street was alive with Christmas merry-making; the city resonant with Christmas joys. The lawyer gazed upon the bright scenes with a sigh.

There was a hollow, spasmodic cough from the figure sitting by the grate. The lawyer turned and looked at his client. He had thrown off the fine new overcoat—the Christmas gift of his assistant—upon the back of the chair in which he sat, and a furred cuff dragged on the carpet, one on either side, while the slender figure writhed with the paroxysmal effort. The lawyer walked back and stood beside him. When the paroxysm had ceased, he laid a soft white hand upon the thin, brown one which clasped the chair-arm tightly.

“What are you doing for that cough, Pactolus?” he asked.

“Oh, it is nothing—nothing, sir,” said the other catching his breath after the convulsive effort he had made, and wiping away the moisture which had involuntarily gathered in his eyes. The lawyer noticed that the handkerchief he used was white and fine and bore in the corner a delicate monogram.

“Have you eaten anything to-day?”

"Oh, I'm all right, Mr Phelps."

The man straightened up as if resenting the imputation of weakness.

"But have you eaten?"

"I declare, I've most forgot. You see I was so anxious about this matter—so afraid something would go wrong and I might lose all I had worked for, all my life. Besides, I haven't quite got used to my new quarters yet."

"You should not have made a change at this time of the year," said the lawyer in a tone of grave rebuke.

"But you see, Mr. Phelps—" he put his hands together aimlessly as if to express something he found it difficult to utter.

"I know," said the lawyer gently, "it was part of a very foolish plan, but it was kindly meant—bravely intended," he added heartily after a moment's pause, as if he were unaccustomed to words of praise—"I will say that, though I wish you had not done it. By the way, where did you go?"

"Oh, I am very comfortably fixed, very comfortably." He looked up with a smile that showed his appreciation of the other's sympathy, but did not answer the question. There was something furtive about it, as if he purposely avoided the inquiry.

As he did so, the lawyer noticed that the

whites of his eyes were of a dull, bluish tint, as if the color of the lids had somehow become spread over them, leaving the iris not indistinct, indeed, but showing with curious intensity that was little less than horrible. He had never seen him without glasses before. Even the trained lawyer's face could not conceal an expression of surprise, almost of aversion, as he caught sight of the strange eyeballs.

"I forgot I had taken off my glasses," said the old man meekly, as he let his gaze fall, and adjusted the spectacles upon his nose. He looked around for the knitted cap and drew it also into place with the deftness that marks accustomed movements.

"It might be well that I should know your address," said the lawyer with evident embarrassment.

"Oh, you will always find me at the 'Best House'; we keep early hours there,—and generally late ones, too."

The lawyer saw that his client did not mean to give his address. He waited a moment, then unlocked the door, stepped around to the other side of his desk, touched an electric button, took out a pad of paper, and lifting the cover of a curiously shaped brass inkstand began to write. The door opened after a moment, and a man entered. He did not seem

pleased at being disturbed. No one likes to perform even a customary duty on a holiday. The man's contract was for every day in the year, but he did not expect to work on Christmas, though he would not fail to demand pay for it as well as every other day.

"I am sorry to call you to-day, Jerry; but I have some business that will not wait for Christmas," his employer said pleasantly, as he tore the sheet from the pad, folded it, took a bill from his pocket and gave them, with some whispered directions, to the servitor.

"I 'spose I might as well be going," said Prime. His tone showed that he thought he might be in the way, but he did not look up.

"Wait a while," was the answer. "I must have some farther talk with you."

The lawyer resumed his seat by the fire and began to ask questions about the subject of their previous conversation. After a time the servitor reappeared with a basket in his hand followed by a colored waiter from a neighboring restaurant, bearing a tray. The lawyer nodded toward the desk. The servant removed the inkstand; the waiter spread a cloth over the green baize and placed on it a tempting lunch-con. There were covers for two. Pactolus Prime paid no attention to what was going on.

Jerry handed the change to the lawyer. He took one of the coins and gave it to the waiter, who bowed and grinned, scraping his foot backward as he did so.

"Thank'e, sah; wish hit was Chris'mas ebbery day in de year, sah."

The lawyer waved his hand slightly in accustomed acknowledgment.

"You may get the baby a Christmas gift with the rest, Jerry," he said, pushing away the hand that held the change.

The man's face brightened as he acknowledged the present.

"Call a cab for me in an hour," added the attorney, consulting his watch.

Both the servants cast an inquiring glance at the crouching figure in the chair as they passed out.

"What yer 'spose de matter wid Uncle Prime?" asked the waiter as they went along the hall. A lawyer's servant is usually a very prudent person; besides this, Jerry had the larger moiety of the bill Mr. Phelps had given him still firmly clutched in his hand, so he was not inclined to be communicative.

"Well, Prime," said the lawyer after a time, "I cannot work, even on Christmas, without something to eat, so I sent out for a little snack. Sit up and help me eat it."

"But, Mr. Phelps—" began Prime apologetically.

"I am not accustomed to having such invitations declined," interrupted the other courteously, but with a firmness that made further refusal impossible.

He moved a couple of chairs to the side of the desk; picked up the other's hat from the floor and hung it with his overcoat upon a rack behind the desk where the servant had placed his own. Then pointing to the other chair, he sat down and began to serve the viands with the skill which only a *bon vivant* ever attains; for Willard Phelps was not only one of the first lawyers of the national capital, but also one of the most polished gentlemen of the country. His courtesy was of that unconscious kind which gave warmth to all he did, and not only made him a welcome guest in the most exclusive circles of society, but rendered an invitation to his board a privilege to be prized by the highest. He was a man as well known in society as in his profession, one who had sat in the councils of more than one President, yet who was remembered by all who knew him rather as a man than as an official.

It was a strange Christmas feast—the host, the courtly leader of the bar of the capital city of the most Christian nation; his guest, the

dusky boot-black of the Best House! The white Christian and the black pariah sitting at the same board! Yet there was no lack of courtesy on the part of the one, and no unaccustomed awkwardness on the part of the other! But the door was locked. It was only an informal lunch—a “snack” as the lawyer had called it. Besides it was Christmas, when even a white saint might perchance be permitted to break bread with a fainting fellow of dusky hue without reproach, “so blessed and so hallowed is the time!” Yet the door was securely locked. The lawyer had turned the key to save his guest from embarrassment, quite as much as to screen himself from reproach. He was not one who feared the world, and what he believed it his duty to do was sure to be done regardless of consequences to himself; but he had no desire to incur unnecessary odium, and knew that the act in which he was engaged, however harmless it might seem to some, was not one that would pass unchallenged even amid the kindly festivities of the Christmas-tide. The law had opened the door of the public hotel to the unfortunate wayfarer of dusky hue, but there were very few in all the city who would not be shocked could they look in upon him and his strange guest. He knew Prime well enough, too, to understand that if he

suspected it would be known, nothing could induce him to imperil in the least degree the social status of his entertainer. He did not once think of the words of the Master, "As ye did it unto one of the least of these, my brethren," but he did wonder what welcome the Saviour would receive should he come again to earth without the pomp of an angelic following, and clothed in a fleshly garment of dusky hue.

When their repast was over and they had returned to their seats beside the grate, the lawyer lighted his cigar, and said:

"You haven't told me about your wife, Prime."

"I don't know nothing 'bout her an' don't want to," answered the other sullenly.

"I should be glad to spare you, but as your counsel I must know all that you know. If I am going to help you in this, I must not act blindfolded any more."

After some further remonstrance the client complied with his companion's request.

"And that is all you know about her?" the lawyer asked after listening to his story.

"The very last thing. I never wanted to know anything more, and so asked no questions."

"But Benny—?" suggested the lawyer.

"Yes, I recognized him, or rather guessed—as he grew older."

"And you asked no questions?"

"Not a word, sir. I was glad to do him a kindness; I don't bear no ill-will—only I don't want to know."

"And you think he does not suspect the truth?"

"Not a word, sir, not a word, and he must never suspect it. He'd better be thought a white man without a dollar than have much more than I could give him and be counted a nigger."

"I'm not sure but you are right, Prime. I don't like deception, but when people are so—so nearly—"

"Just as white as anybody!" exclaimed Prime excitedly. "Why, Benny could take his mother, sir, and go anywhere among strangers, and nobody'd ever dream they weren't white. An' he's got good blood in him, Mr. Phelps—ain't no better in all the South. Never was any real no-count ones among 'em until Marse Junius, an' I don't know as he'd have been if he hadn't been bewitched."

"Did you know he became very rich?"

"No, did he?"

"So I hear."

"Well," said Prime, with evident satisfac-

tion, "it's in the blood to get on! I tell you, Benny'll make a man an' no mistake. If he was only white I'd back him to be President—I would for a fact. It's in the blood. But how'd Marse Jun make his money? I hain't no cause to feel kindly toward him, but I'm glad he's got on—for the sake of the family name, you know!" He laughed bitterly, but it was plain to see that his pride was gratified.

"I understand it was in fertilizers—phosphates, I believe."

"In Alabama?" asked the old man, keenly.

"No—South Carolina."

"On the Ashley?"

"Yes."

"Not—you don't mean?"

The old man sprang to his feet and his eyes glowed through his glasses with unconcealed hate.

"That is my understanding."

"By God! that is *too* much! How did he get it?"

"Bought it for a song—of *the widow*," significantly.

"And what did he do—with *her*?" asked Prime with brutal coarseness.

"She ran away as soon as she got the money. It wasn't much, but she did not squander it."

"And Benny's been a help to her," mused Prime

"Indeed he has."

"An' so Marse Bug got his hand onto that, too? The rascal!" exclaimed the old man, "to cheat his own kin—and *he a nigger!*"

"You did not know he was dead?"

"No, is he? I'm glad on't," said the other savagely. "I shant have to kill him now. I don't know how I've kept my hands off him so long. I've always meant to do it some time; jes' been puttin' it off for—for *her* sake, you know. Now I shant have that to answer for. Who's got the plantation now?"

"His brother."

"Marse Ephrum? Heired it, I s'pose. Can't he be put out, Mr. Phelps? Couldn't Benny oust him?"

"Benny has no title."

"But if he had? Suppose he had a deed from the owner?"

"That might involve a judicial inquiry which would prevent his being—well, anything else, you know."

"I see; he'd have to admit himself a 'nigger' to get possession!"

The old man sprang to his feet and paced back and forth across the office, dragging his lame leg after him as if unconscious of

his infirmity. Then he looked around and said:

"He's got to have it, Mr. Phelps, Benny's got to have it; but how?—tell me how. You're a lawyer; you ought to know. That rascal shan't keep it!"

"If it was deeded to another, a stranger—perhaps—" said the lawyer musingly.

The client stumped back and forth across the office once or twice before he spoke. The lawyer watched him with grave concern. At length the old man said—still keeping his face turned away from the other's gaze:

"Mr. Phelps, do you know where Mazy is?"

"Yes, Prime, I do."

"She's gettin' along well, I 'spose?" His voice trembled.

"Do you want to know where she is?"

"I—I'd like to see her—just once."

"You know Benny's name?"

"Of course."

"Do you know any one else of that name?"

The man turned like a flash.

"You don't mean to say—?"

The lawyer nodded an affirmative reply to the half-spoken question.

"This is your work, Mr. Phelps!"

"Yes, Prime—I did it."

"You—you—why did you do it?"

"I wanted to do you a kindness."

"And she is—*white!*—she's crossed the color-line! You put her across it?"

The lawyer bowed assent.

"And she—knows?"

"She does not even suspect."

"Strange that—that I didn't!"

"Gray hairs," said the lawyer sententiously.

"She's grown stouter, too."

"Naturally."

The client resumed his halting walk across the floor. After a time he came and stood before the lawyer. He spoke calmly, and there was no trace of emotion in his voice. The dialect came out strong in his speech, however, showing his agitation.

"I see my way clar, now, Mr. Phelps—jes ez clar ez day. They'd all be white ef hit warn't fer me—no denyin' that. Hit's bein' connected with me that makes 'em black—or makes people think of 'em ez black. What's the remedy? Take me out'n the case—send me away—wipe me out!"

"But I don't see—?"

"Don't stop me—I'll tell ye how. I'm gwine away—no matter whar—ner fer how long nuther. I'm gwine ter leave everythin' ter you—all but the money in the bank—that's enough fer me; an' you—you're to do with it

jes' what you think's fer the good of all on 'em. I'll be their scape-goat—I'll take their sins, or at least their blackness, into the wilderness an' leave them 'ez white ez wool,' as the Scriptur says. Wool's changed sence them days," he added with a laugh; "it aint esteemed a sign uv whiteness now! That's what I'm goin' to do, Mr. Phelps. Make out the papers—right away!"

"But, Prime, if you make me your trustee—?"

"Who said anythin' 'bout a trustee? I'm gwine ter *give* hit to ye—out an' out—don't yer see? Nobody'll ever suspect you of bein' a 'nigger'!"

"But I might—"

"Oh, I kin trust *you*—or if you should conclude ter keep it fer yerself, I wouldn't feel so very bad about it. *They've* got enough, an' Benny'll git along—I'll resk *him*! You're the next one, anyhow. I shan't feel bad—'specially ef you should need it. Keep half on't ef you want to; you're welcome to it. Only make Marse Ephrum smart! That's what I want."

After some farther conversation the lawyer prepared certain papers, the client signed them, and the servant was called to witness the signatures. He was not in the most discriminating condition of mind; the lawyer's gratuity, or the influence of the joyous season, having some-

how unstrung his nerves, but the soberest man in the city could not have signed his name with more unmistakable certainty, and that is the chief thing required of a subscribing witness.

When this was done the client put on his coat and prepared to take his leave.

"Good-by, Mr. Phelps," he said, extending his hand. "The sooner I get away the better. You can make my excuses at the Best House. I hate to leave—it's been a good job, and we've never had any trouble. Tell Benny not to be in a hurry to sell out. The new Administration will make things lively here in Washington—for a while, anyhow; always does. I don't know when I'll see you again—perhaps never!"

"Do you think you had better do this, Prime?" asked the lawyer with emotion.

"Don't try to persuade me. My mind's made up. Good-by."

He wrung the hand held out to him and started hastily away. The lawyer heard him going down the stairs. Several minutes had elapsed when he opened the door again and said without coming in:

"I hope you'll pardon me for what I said about the 'White Christ,' Mr. Phelps. I was wrong, sir. There ain't many He's been as good to as to me. I don't know what He

means by the way He's allowed my people to be treated, and it ain't necessary I should know. He knows, and that's enough. It's sufficient for me that He's showed me a way to take the curse off from the ones I love—my own particular ones. I'd like to wish you a Merry Christmas, sir, and have you wish me one."

"Very gladly, indeed, Prime," said the lawyer, going to the door and extending his hand, "Merry Christmas and many Happy New Years to you!"

"Thank ye, sah: the same to you."

He bowed respectfully. They shook hands again.

"Good-by, sah."

"Good-by, Prime."

The lawyer listened to the dragging steps along the hall, and wondered when he would hear them again. While he waited he took some blanks from his desk and filled them out.

"The cab's a-waitin', sir."

The lawyer put on his hat and gloves, told the servant he would not be in again during the day, and was driven rapidly away.

XIV.

PROFESSIONAL COURTESY.

“O MAJOR!” cried Phelps, as he signaled the driver to stop, and drew up to the pavement on E Street, along which the one-armed veteran was making his way as if the fate of the nation depended on his reaching his destination within a time limited. “I was just going to your office, Major Wolcott, on the chance of finding you in—a poor chance, I suppose, to-day?” he added with a smile.

“Not at all,” answered the Major cheerfully. “My practice isn’t heavy enough to prevent my taking a day off now and then, but the bother of it is I’m always afraid a good thing may happen along when I’m out, you know. If I had yours, now,” he added, but without a touch of envy, “I should be quite above watching for clients on Christmas Day—though it’s always been a lucky day for me in that respect.”

“I hope this one has been no exception,” said Phelps graciously.

"Well, it's three o'clock," rejoined the other with a grimace, "and thus far I haven't caught so much as the promise of a retainer."

"Get in then," said Phelps, making room for him, "if you have a little time to spare, and let me see if I can't change your luck."

"I don't know any better way to do so than to be seen hobnobbing with you," said the other gracefully, as he took his seat.

"Good," said Phelps with a laugh. "The Marshal's office," he called to the driver as he shut the door. "You ought to have been a courtier, Major."

"Just my luck," said the veteran gayly. "I tried to be a soldier and made a poor out of it; tried to grow cotton for a while; tried my hand at speculation; edited a paper; got a clerkship, and for the last three years have been practicing law. I don't think I have been a stunning success in either of these rôles. Perhaps I ought to have been a courtier, as you say. If you know of an opening in that line just tip me a wink, won't you?"

"Indeed, I will, Major," said the successful lawyer, with an admiring glance at the veteran, whose seedy clothes were worn with a jauntiness that showed how foolish it was for fate to try to break his spirit, "but just now I have a little business in which I may need your help."

"Well, that will do while we are waiting for the other. What is it?"

"Have you been consulted by a man named Collins?"

"Collins? Collins?" repeated the Major, knitting his brows. "Candidly, sir, I do not think that among the limited number of those who have been so unfortunate as to consider my services indispensable to their interests, indeed, I may say I am quite sure—not one is so fortunate as to bear that illustrious patronymic. I did have a Washington once—one of the genuine stock, too,—but he happened to belong to the colored branch of the family. No, I have no such client *in presenti*, or so far as I know, *in prospectu*."

"Then you are open to a retainer against him?"

"Open! My dear sir, it's what I've been waiting for 'from days to which the memory of man runneth not to the contrary.' "

"Consider yourself retained, then," said the other carelessly, handing him a bill.

"Thanks, awfully," returned the veteran as he took the money, "but candidly, Mr. Phelps," he added with a wistful look in his eyes, "this is a most inconvenient size of bill for me to change—just now."

"That's all right," said the other with a deprecatory wave of the hand.

"Honor bright? You didn't expect me to break it?"

"Certainly not."

"Then here goes," he said, thrusting the money in his pocket. "What's the business? I don't need to tell you I'm obliged; but I will tell you, that your ears will burn when my wife gets her Christmas present. Candidly, the good Saint missed our house last night," he added with a shrug, looking out of the window of the carriage and dashing his hand across his eyes.

His companion pretended not to notice his embarrassment, and after a moment, said in a perfectly matter-of-fact manner:

"I am anxious to get service on a man named Ephraim Collins, who is stopping at the Best House, at once. I'm afraid we shall not find any one at the Marshal's, but you can arrange to get the papers into his hands to-night, I hope."

"I'll do it or die a-trying," answered the Major confidently. "Slippery?"

"Not at all; you'll have plenty of time after getting your present for the Madame."

"Business first," said the veteran. "That's always been my motto, and—you see what it's brought me to," glancing at his cloak.

The two men laughed heartily—the one at

his companion's invincible good-nature, the other because he felt like laughing.

"Here are the papers," said Phelps drawing an envelope from his pocket. "You will mark your name as attorney, please."

"What did you say is our client's name?"

"I have the honor to be your client."

"What! The honor is mine, sir. Here, I cannot take money from you, sir." The gallant fellow's face fell, but he pulled the bill from his pocket and handed it back to his companion. "It would be unprofessional, you know."

"Allow me to waive my privilege—thanking you all the same."

"I can't do it, sir; besides, the privilege of representing you will be ample compensation—it will make my fortune, sir." He pressed the bill into the other's hand as he spoke.

"Will you allow me to make a present to your wife, Major?"

"Really, I don't see that I could object—your reputation is not bad enough to justify me in doing so," he added jocularly.

"A gift would lose half its value if you did not carry it, and really my time is very much occupied. Please oblige me. Here we are at the Marshal's. Good-day."

He slipped the bill into the envelope and handed the parcel to his companion as he

stood upon the sidewalk. The door closed and the cab drove away before the one-armed veteran had a chance to make farther objection.

"I've heard a lot of kind things of him," said the latter, looking after the carriage with tears in his eyes, "but this beats them all. Well, he shan't lose anything by it this time. Hello!" he added as he walked up the marble steps. "What's this? 'Assignee of P. P. Smith.' Wonder if old 'Pepperpod' has turned up again?"

XV.

BAFFLED ENTERPRISE.

THE lawyer's cab halted before a handsome residence fronting on one of the numerous little parks which mark the intersection of the Streets and Avenues of the capital city. Mr. Phelps alighted, went up the steps and rang the bell.

"Can I see Miss Eva?" he asked of the servant who opened the door.

"She's in the parlor, answered the maid. "Walk right in, sir; 'taint hardly a minit since the young man from your office come."

"From my office!" repeated the lawyer in surprise.

"So he said, sir, an' a nice young man he is, too. He said he wanted to see Miss Eva on a matter of great importance as you had sent him about."

"Ah," said the lawyer carelessly. "You may show me into the back parlor, if you please. I must see Miss Eva about quite another matter; but there is no haste. You need not disturb her; she knows I was to call at this hour. I

will amuse myself until she is at liberty. Here is something for Christmas."

He dropped a coin into the girl's hand and was left alone.

The portière between the rooms was only half-closed, and if fully drawn could hardly have prevented what passed in the one from being heard in the other. The lawyer walked deliberately across the room in order that his presence might become known, seated himself at a side window which looked out upon the intersecting avenue, and soon became conscious of the tenor of the conversation going on upon the other side of the curtain.

"I thought you said you came from Mr. Phelps?" a woman's voice said in a tone of surprise.

"Not exactly *from* him," was the reply, "but he was speaking to me about a very interesting matter in which you are interested, in which he was to play the part of the good St. Nicholas. Of course, being a lawyer he could not divulge the secrets of his clients, but—well, he intimated that we might obtain the information at headquarters; so I came straight to you. The *Index* always gets its facts at first hand if possible."

"I really do not understand you, Mr. Stearns," answered the lady with evident cool-

ness. Something in the tone convinced the lawyer that she knew her words were heard by him—that indeed she intended them to be.

“Oh, do not say that, Miss Smith!”

“Collins, sir—my name is Collins,” said the young lady severely. “If Mr. Phelps sent you he should at least have told you my name.”

“Oh, he did not send me,” responded the gentleman, whom he now recognized as the reporter Stearns; “indeed he did not know of my coming. He half-told his own errand and I found out the rest. You are not the happy recipient then of the munificent Christmas gift he brought. But perhaps you can tell me something about this lucky Miss Smith into whose mouth—no doubt a charming one—fortune drops such exceptionally succulent plums.”

“I do not understand you, sir.”

“Ah, I beg pardon. The matter seems to be almost as elusive as it is romantic.”

“To what do you refer, sir?”

The young lady's tone was icy and the inquirer was evidently not making very satisfactory progress.

“Can it be possible that you are unacquainted with the romantic episode that has to-day transpired touching the very house you occupy? A Mr. Smith—P. P. Smith,” he repeated—“has given property amounting to more than a hun-

dred thousand dollars in value, including this very house, to one Eva C. Smith, for the consideration of one dollar and natural love and affection."

"She is very fortunate."

"But you do not know her?"

"I have no acquaintance with any such person," was the reply.

"I beg pardon, but in that case you know nothing, I suppose, of Mr. Smith, either?"

"Nothing, sir."

"It is very strange," said the reporter musingly. "There are the deeds registered in due form, covering a large amount of property evidently intended as a gift, and neither donor nor donee to be found in the directory or known to any resident of the District."

"You seem to have taken considerable trouble in the matter."

"I have been on the track of Mr. Smith ever since Mr. Phelps left your house early this morning."

"And you find no trace of him?"

"Oh yes, I find traces enough,—deeds, mortgages, bonds—the records are full of him. For a dozen years he has bought and sold real estate in Washington, usually operating with singular sagacity. He is supposed to be a man of large wealth, but nobody appears to have ever seen

him. Almost every deed he has given has been witnessed and proved by his attorney, who seems to have been the only man who is known to have set eyes on him in that time. And now he makes a deed to a person just as hard to find as himself. It is very provoking!"

"It must be," responded the young lady tartly. "Why don't you have a law passed that no one shall do anything interesting without furnishing the details to the newspapers? That would save you all this trouble."

"Of course, it is funny to you, but to a reporter who has to make his living by finding out things, it is not so pleasant."

"And do you think the people find it pleasant—those into whose affairs you peep and pry to gratify a morbid curiosity for the weakness and misfortunes of others? What do you suppose they think of such as you?"

"One has to live," said the reporter with a shrug.

"Suppose that were accounted a sufficient excuse for theft and burglary?"

"But our business is not unlawful, Miss," retorted the reporter. "It may be unpleasant, but no one can claim that it is not honorable. In fact, the press has been the great educator—the great civilizer of the world."

"The press? Oh, you mean the printing-

press. No doubt it is a wonderful power for good or evil. But that other thing that calls itself 'the press,' the great scandal-monger with its army of thieves and spies—which feeds on filth and misfortune, what good has it done? What honor is there in its service?"

"You are too hard on us poor reporters. I assure you—"

"Spare me your protests, sir. I understand that I am in your power just as much as if you were a burglar with a deadly weapon in your hand. You opened my door, not indeed with a false key, but with a false pretense—a false token. You came here not to steal money or jewels but to destroy my peace—to blast my good name if you could, in order to give the readers of the *Index* a sensation. It was an honorable purpose, perhaps I should say a commendable one!"

"But surely so good a deed as this—such a munificent act of generosity—you cannot think it improper to wish to make it public?"

"Then why not make it public? Why not speak of it as an act of princely generosity? But that is not what you desire. You want to find something mean—something sinister—something unworthy in it! Nothing but shame and depravity will satisfy you. Only a month ago, a man gave a million dollars to the holiest

cause on earth. It was the chief part of the honorable accumulations of a life-time. Twenty lines told all you thought necessary to be said about this man and his gift. On the same day, a man paid the hundredth part of the sum thus given, by compulsion of the law, to remedy a wrong he had committed; and you took three-quarters of a column to describe the man, his victim, and the wrong—in other words, you did all in your power to make his long-deferred atonement worthless to its recipient.”

“I wonder, since you have so ill an opinion of the profession, why you do not order me out of your presence—have me expelled from the house.—” said the reporter, exasperated by her taunts.

“Oh, I dare not, sir. I am in your power. I must submit, not only quietly but smilingly, to whatever indignity you may see fit to put upon me. Ah, no, sir; I understand too well the power you represent. If I do not answer your questions I know you will make me an object of contempt and ridicule to-morrow—perhaps even an object of suspicion. I have no idea what figure I might not cut in your columns, if I should be so unfortunate as to offend you. You might make the neighbors shrink from me—close the doors of respectable houses in my face, and make a thrill of horror run through

the hearts of the assembled worshipers, if I should venture inside a church door! Turn you out? Dear me, I would sit here until I dropped dead rather than have you think a representative of the *Index* was not altogether welcome! I would, I think, commit suicide rather than let you know how I despise a liar, a sneak, a gossip,—who prowls about the doors and steals into houses to find out things people desire to keep hidden! Oh, I want you to give a good account of me! I do, indeed,” cried the satirical girl. “In the first place you must make me out a beauty.”

“I could not well help doing that,” said the reporter gallantly.

“Oh, yes, you could; but you must make me a smiling, wicked, ravishing beauty. You must make my feet some sizes smaller than they are; my waist to measure less than eighteen inches; go into raptures over my hand,—not forgetting to hint that I have an eminent manicure to care for the nails; turn your imagination loose on my gown, and hint—only just hint, remember—at an inexhaustible fund of latent wickedness in my charming make-up! You will, of course, say how delighted I was to see you; how glad I was that—that a reporter—especially such a gallant, attractive and discreet reporter—was sent by the *Index* to inquire how I had passed

my Christmas and what I thought of my neighbors!

“Oh, yes, and you might add,—just to give it a little spice and make it especially interesting to the best people in the city,—that Mr. Phelps called here before nine o’clock this morning, stayed exactly forty-two and a half minutes, while you marched up and down the other side of the street with your thumb on the spring of your stop-watch, waiting for him to come out. You might add, too, that he found it hard to go away; that after he had opened the hall door, he closed it again, came back and stayed some seconds longer. Being a man of unblemished reputation and having a family he adores, you will not of course miss an opportunity to injure him or annoy them. You might say, also, that he made an appointment to return about the time you called; that while you were here a coupé drove up, you heard the bell ring, the front door open and shut, and some one was ushered into the back parlor, where, you have no doubt, the eminent lawyer sat patiently awaiting your departure that he might once more bask in the smiles of the fair siren, etc. etc!

“That is what you will do, Mr. Stearns, because you wish to oblige me and to requite the favor a good man has shown you. If you do

it—well, I shall take pleasure in sending you a check for—really I do not know what is the proper fee for such carrion-birds—but whatever is the correct thing, that you will receive! You deserve a Christmas gift; you have earned one by your rugged display of Christian manhood! Now if you *could* excuse me, sir,”—the girl had evidently risen and was approaching the portière—“if it is not asking *too* much—I would like to go to Mr. Phelps. The business on which he has called is of importance, and he is one of the men who deserves his Christmas dinner—he is not a liar!”

Even the reporter's cheek was not proof against this sarcastic tirade. He interrupted the angry beauty as she swept across the room toward the portière, however, and said:

“I beg your pardon, Miss Collins. But if you will allow me—how did you learn these things?—how did you know I—”

“How did I know you had dogged Mr. Phelps's steps, and would call on me to-day? Candidly, I knew it because he told me so. That is what he came back for. He said there was a young man on the *Index* whom he had unfortunately recommended as a gentleman, who, guessing something from a remark he had accidentally overheard, was following his track to see if he could not discover what the

professional honor of a lawyer had prevented him from disclosing. As he was to call about this time, I infer that he is the visitor whom you no doubt heard enter. Perhaps you would like to meet him and inquire his business. He said you would be sure to call. Just step this way, please."

The reporter drew back. At that moment Mr. Phelps pushed aside the portière and entered the room.

"Will you be kind enough to wait in my cab outside, Mr. Stearns? I will not keep you long."

The lawyer spoke quietly, but there was a light in his blue eye that prevented any parley. The reporter bowed and withdrew.

XVI.

AN INTRACTABLE DONEE.

“WELL?” said the young lady as soon as they were alone, looking anxiously up into the lawyer’s eyes.

“I hope you have not lost confidence in me, Miss Smith?”

“I shall if you call me by that name again.”

“Yet that is the one to which you are entitled; ‘Eva Collins Smith’ is your baptismal name.”

“I will have it changed—I will not recognize it! I have been Eva Collins all my life and will change the name for no other!”

“Is not that a pretty rash vow for a young lady to make?” asked the lawyer smilingly.

“At least, until I see good reason to do so,” she added with a blush and a laugh.

“That is better,” said her companion approvingly. “Now we shall get on. I shall call you Miss Collins, then, until you give me leave to change the appellation. Will that do?”

“That will do,” she responded gayly, “and since you are so kind, I will agree never to change my name until you advise me to do so.”

"Oh, don't put that responsibility on me; I have a daughter of my own, remember."

"You do not know how I envy her."

She cast down her eyes and the blood surged up into her face.

The girl was hardly more than eighteen, slight and fair. The eyes that had met the lawyer's gaze so steadily were wide-open gray ones, framed with heavy brows, the lids fringed with long, dark lashes. Her hair, which was of a neutral brown, was abundant and worn in a simple coil at the back of the head, whose perfect outlines were thus clearly displayed. A simple dress of dark blue cloth, a hint of white at wrist and neck, with a dull gold pin having a flat medallion head, shot dagger-wise across the throat, were the only things about her costume that attracted the lawyer's attention as he scanned face and figure as if he had never seen her before.

"Will you sit down and tell me what you know about yourself, Miss Collins?"

He extended his hand as if to offer a pledge of sincerity. The girl laid her left upon it. / A woman seldom uses the hand-clasp as a pledge. She gives her hand as a token of assent, surrender, confidence, but rarely as a pledge of purpose.) When custom impels her to do so, it is apt to seem mannish and unnatural. In this

case, the gesture was an instinctive expression of confidence and was so construed. He led her to a sofa and they sat down.

"I did not ask from mere curiosity," he said after a moment, not apologetically but as if to make it easier for her to begin.

"Oh, I understand," she answered absently. "I was thinking what to say. I know so little," she continued, looking up at him with earnest candor. "If you would ask me questions, Mr. Phelps."

Their hands rested on the sofa between them, hers still clasped in his as if she had forgotten to remove it.

"What is your first memory? Where did you live?" he asked.

"At the South."

Her eyes had fallen to the floor and she was unconsciously following a figure of the carpet with the toe of her slipper moving between it and her eyes.

"Do you know where?"

"I do not. I was very young. I never heard anything about it afterward and was afraid to ask."

"Why afraid?"

"I hardly know,—I was."

"Do you remember the house?"

"It was a large one, low and rambling, not

stately but roomy. I should say it was unpainted, though that seems absurd. There was a river near, in front I think, and a hillside sloping down to it. A good many large trees stood about; and back of it were barns and cultivated fields. Somewhere near it, I seem to remember a thick, dark growth of evergreens, coming almost up to the house."

"Do you remember who lived there—occupied the house, I mean?"

"There was a man and a woman and—servants, I think—I am not sure."

"Your father and mother?"

"I suppose so."

"Can you describe them?"

"My father,—I am almost sure he was my father,—but I don't know how to describe him. I cannot remember his appearance, yet I think I should know him."

"Does the photograph I brought resemble him?"

"I think so. I have been studying it, and it seems familiar. What I remember most clearly is that he was always busy. I think he employed a number of laborers and worked with them. He must have been very fond of me, for I seem to recall being with him a great deal. I think I used to ride behind him on horseback."

"And the woman?"

"Yes, I think you would call her a woman—that is, I do not think you would call her a lady."

The girl looked up at him fearlessly.

"I understand," he answered kindly. "Can you describe her appearance?"

"I think she resembled me,—except her hair; that was lighter, and her features were perhaps more,—well, more harmonious,—I suppose, that might express it."

She cast down her eyes again, and the lawyer, noting the delicate curve of her neck and the softened outline of the jaw, doubted if the comparison was just. He had seen many beautiful women, but thought just then that he had never seen one in whom there were clearer evidences of high breeding. Everything about her, from her frankness of manner to her softness of outline, confirmed this impression.

"You think she was your mother?"

"I—I suppose so."

The lines of her mouth grew somewhat harder as she spoke.

"You called her by what name?"

"Mammy."

The lawyer started as she pronounced the word. Almost unconsciously he withdrew his hand from hers. It was that unmistakable pronunciation of the word, by which the Negro

child designates its mother and the white child its nurse.

"Were there any other children?"

"I—I think so. I think my father was a harsh man."

"To whom?"

"Everybody, except me. He must have been gentle with me or I would not have such a tender feeling for him,—I can hardly call it memory."

"When did you leave this place?"

"I don't know. Something dreadful happened, something I ought to have remembered,—but I don't,—and that is the end of everything—everything!" she repeated, spreading her hands before her as if to show how dense a wall had been built up between her and her childhood's memories.

"And what do you next recall? Where were you after that?"

"Here—in Washington."

"Where? Can you describe the place?"

"Oh, perfectly. We must have lived there until I was nearly ten years old."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?"

"Pac—Uncle Pac and I."

"Was there no one else?"

"Never," said the girl positively. "I do not remember that anybody came to visit us,

either. Oh, we were very, very happy though. The house was small but very comfortable,—within, I mean; outside it was much neglected. It was a little house over toward Meridian Hill, hardly more than a hut, but a big lot, overgrown with weeds and briars. It was only the front that was neglected. He seemed to want it to look as if nobody lived there. I remember there was a big pokeberry bush that grew almost as high as the eaves, just at the corner of the house. I used to look through it at the Monument and wonder why it seemed the higher. Then there were raspberries and mulleins, weeds of all sorts which made the yard a thicket from one stone wall to the other.”

“I see,” said the lawyer, thoughtfully. “And you remained there—how long?”

“Until I was ten years old.”

“And then?”

“I was sent to the Sisters.”

“In Montreal, I think?”

The girl nodded, absently.

“You had attended school before that?”

“Yes; the public school here.”

“Do you know why you were sent away?”

“I can only guess. One of the teachers came to inquire about me. She wanted to know, she said, what ‘an old nigger like Uncle Pac’ was doing with a little white girl like me.”

"What did he tell her?"

"That I was his old master's child—his old master who was dead,—and that he was taking care of me."

"She went away satisfied, I suppose?"

"She went away, and in a few days he took me to Montreal. On the way, he told me the same story. I never believed it," said the girl, looking up at her companion's face.

"Why not?"

"Uncle Pac laughed after the teacher went away, and said she was mighty smart, but not smart enough to catch him."

"You do not think you are his old master's child, then?"

"I don't know," casting down her glance; "I believe my mother was a—a colored woman."

"What makes you think so?"

"I cannot tell."

"And Uncle Pac?"

"He is somehow related to me—I think to my father; he never mentions my mother, and was angry with me once for asking about her."

"You stayed at the Sisters,—how long?"

"Five years."

"And went from there to the New England College at which you graduated last summer?"

"Yes."

"And in all that time you saw no relative,—heard from none?"

"Only Uncle Pac."

"Exactly, and when you came back it was to this house?"

"Yes."

"You have a companion?"

"There is a housekeeper."

"A lady?"

"You would not call her so. A widow, Southern—very kind, motherly and capable, but not exactly what you would call a lady."

"Who employed her?"

"Why, she says you did, Mr. Phelps," answered the girl with a laugh. "You seem to have paid all my bills, too—at least your checks did. If I did not hate to think ill of you, I should say you were none other than Mr. P. P. Smith himself. Indeed, I did think so until this very day."

"And how came you to change your opinion?" he asked gravely, though his face flushed.

"I think you would not lie; if you were my father you would tell me so."

"I don't know," said the lawyer, rising and walking across the floor, his head bowed and biting his lip.

"I don't mean you would make it public, but you would tell *me*," she said, going to his side,

laying her hand on his arm and gazing up into his face.

"I—I think I should," he answered, looking down upon her.

"And I," she said drawing herself up proudly, "I would die at the stake before the fact should ever become known to your discredit. I am willing to hide a father's shame if need be, but I will not obliterate myself for so much money!"

"You persist in refusing this gift, then?"

"Unless I can have Uncle Pac to live with me. He furnished me a home and cared for me as a child, and I will not have him turned out of any house that is to be my home. He lived here until the day I was expected; met me at the station; brought me here; introduced me to the housekeeper, and went away. Why should he treat me in that manner?"

"You wish him to come and see you, now and then?"

"I want him to come and live with me—all the time."

"But you would not like to treat him as an inferior?"

"Why should I?"

"You know that if you treated him as an equal—a relative, for instance—you could not be received in society as—as—"

"As a lady," interrupted the girl. "Yes, I know that. You yourself, would not dare treat me as an equal. You would not think of introducing me to your daughter, of asking me to your table. Perhaps you would not even care to be seen ringing the bell at my door! Oh, I understand what it is to be considered a colored person, more especially a colored woman! I know that no merit, no ability, no refinement, no accomplishment, can put me on a level with even the lowest born and most vulgar white woman of the land. It matters not how slight the trace of color nor what the attendant comeliness. The greater the beauty, indeed, the more terrible the curse. No white woman can call such an one her friend; no white man offer her love that is not an insult!

"When I thought that you were my father, that you were trying to make atonement, and desired to place me beyond suspicion of a parentage that might entail illimitable sorrow, I said to myself that if you trusted me, if you confided in me and gave me a little love, I would consent that it should be hidden for your sake. You see, I hoped that you would be proud of me; and I worked hard to make myself deserving of your pride. It was your name on the checks, you see,—this and the remembrance of my early days that put such

thoughts in my mind. I think I was almost glad to be the child of your shame, for I thought—well, I thought I would make you forget my origin!

“Don’t stop me! I want to say it and have it over; besides we shall be separated, soon. The bottomless pit lies between us. God may bridge it over, but man never can. You are a good Christian, but if Christ were black you would not dare ask Him to your table! I know you pity me. I see you do not think meanly of me, but if I were the loveliest and most gifted woman in the world, and your son loved me, you would bid him pluck his heart out of his bosom rather than think of giving it to me. Nay, if he were insane enough to think of marriage, and I was weak enough to give assent, you would order your door shut in his face and pass him by unrecognized on the streets!”

“Of course,” said the lawyer, frowning until his gray eyebrows met. “Society is stronger than any man, and society is—white!”

“Yes,” she responded, “and the world is white—Christianity is white! Only the refuse and the dregs of either are possible to the colored man or woman!”

She let go his arm and went and stood looking out of the window.

"That is true—in a sense," answered the lawyer, hesitatingly. "It will change, though,—in time."

"‘And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth!’" quoted the girl with mocking emphasis.

"Oh, there will come a time before that," he insisted, eagerly. "When the colored race shall have acquired wealth, intelligence and power—"

"Will it make them white?" she asked, turning upon him a pale, set face.

"No, certainly not—but then—"

"I am rich, am I not—or may be, at least?"

"Yes."

"I do not lack intelligence?"

"Far from it."

"You do not deem me without attractions?"

"You are very—charming, shall I say?"

"If I were known to be of colored blood to-morrow, would not the poorest and meanest white girl in the city be deemed my superior?"

"Probably; but you know the time must come when the colored race will form a society of its own, and know how to recognize each other's merits."

"Ah!" she said, coming toward him with an angry, impatient gesture. "Then you think society will assume a dual form; there is to be a white aristocracy and a black aristocracy, a

white people and a black people, a white church and a black church! Each is to be a duplicate of the other!

Les belles dames font comme ça !

Les beaux messieurs font comme ça ! "

she sang mockingly, curtseying daintily as she did so. "Oh, what a pretty, peaceful world we shall have! Will you go farther and have a Black Christ as well as a White Christ? I suppose they will maintain 'fraternal relations,' while strictly avoiding all approach to equality. Shall we have a dual millennium, too? And a separate heaven for each? Or will the saints all be white, as Uncle Pac says they used to aver they would be, 'in the good old slave-times'?"

"I am sorry to hear you speak so bitterly, Miss Eva," said the lawyer with respectful sympathy in his tone. He came closer to her as he spoke, as if to give emphasis to his good will.

"Do you blame me?" she asked, looking up at him almost fiercely. "Would you not rather see your daughter dead than in my place? Would you not rather be dead yourself than suffer the contamination of a single drop of colored blood? Talk about Christ! What was the agony of the Cross to the humiliation of a colored man in a white world? For the world is white—I know that—*my* world—the world of ambition, art, literature, society, the world

that contains all that one loves to enjoy—the world which it is life to be a part of, and worse than death to be shut out from—this is white—all white—pure white! All else is foul, inferior—tolerated only!”

The young girl twisted her fingers about each other in agony. The lawyer looked at her in surprise. It was the first time he had ever realized the process through which the intelligent young colored American must always go, before our Christian civilization reduces him finally to his proper level of “essential inferiority.”

“It is for this very reason,” he said at length, “that I wished you should not be precipitate in declaring your affinity with this unfortunate race. Your father is wise as well as considerate, in desiring that no suspicion of such parentage should attach to you. Believe me, my dear young lady, it is for this reason alone that he has taken the step which is so distasteful to you.”

“You think he is not ashamed of me,—of his relation to me?” she asked eagerly.

“He loves you more than anything else on earth!”

The lawyer put his hand upon her head as he spoke, as if she had been a child who needed to be assured of his sympathy. The words and the act moved her visibly.

"Perhaps he has others whom he must consider,—to whom he owes duty?"

Her lips trembled and tears gathered on her lids.

"He thinks of you only; you are his only child."

"What! Why, then—I don't understand—why does he seek to conceal our relationship? Is there any—any disgrace in it?"

She hesitated and cast down her eyes.

"You are his only child, born in lawful wedlock, and would inherit all he offers you to-day and more, upon his death!"

"Then why—why this mystery?"

"He does not wish it to be known that you are his daughter. If you took by inheritance, that fact could not be concealed."

"But how would that hurt him, especially if he were dead?"

"It is not of himself, child, that he is thinking," answered the lawyer almost impatiently. "It is of *you*. Can you not see?"

"Ah!" she exclaimed with a gasp, sinking into a chair. There was a moment's silence. She was looking straight at the wall before her, apparently oblivious of the fact that she was not alone.

"Then he is a colored man, himself," she said after a while.

The lawyer did not answer.

"And wishes to save me from what he has suffered?"

Her companion was still silent.

"His name is—?"

"The one attached to the deed."

"You have seen him?"

"Yes."

"And this is all true?"

She gazed at him keenly as she asked the question.

"Entirely."

"You think it would grieve him if I should not do as he wishes?"

"It would well-nigh break his heart."

"He is,—a worthy man?"

"One of whom any daughter might be proud!" There was an unmistakable enthusiasm in the lawyer's tones.

"You think he will let me know him—some day?"

"I hope so." His voice was getting husky.

"Tell him—I—I will do as he wishes."

"Thank you, in his name!" exclaimed the lawyer, holding out his hand. She gave him hers, the right one this time.

"I must go now," he said cheerfully. "I will see you again in a day or two."

She walked beside him toward the door.

"But, Uncle Pac," she asked, halting, when she had taken a step or two."

"He is very comfortably situated."

"That is not enough; he must come back—to his old place. I cannot enjoy any good fortune he does not share."

"But that will have to be—" he hesitated.

"Of course; I understand.—He is my father's old servant, though, as well as my faithful guardian, and must not be separated from me. That much, I will not yield."

"Well," said the lawyer thoughtfully, biting his lip, "I think it can be arranged."

"When will he come?"

"To-morrow, perhaps."

"He must come to-night. I cannot enjoy my Christmas without him."

"Very well; I will send him."

She held out her hand. The lawyer took it in both his own.

"Good-by," he said, hesitating for a moment, then adding, "I—I am glad to have known you, Miss Eva—and hope to see more of you—some time—some time when—when—"

"When right is wrong and day is night,
When morn is eve and black is white!"

she repeated. "It will never come, Mr. Phelps. The Christ may be the Saviour of both races; but He will never make the white man willing

to do justice to the Negro. He may perhaps change the colored man's skin—even if he has to blanch it with shame—but he will never change the white man's heart. That is too great a miracle to hope for!"

"But you do not doubt my regard?"

"I think you pay me the very highest compliment."

"What is that?"

"You wish I were white that you might welcome me to your home."

"It is true," said the lawyer as he withdrew. He paused in the vestibule to wipe his eyes and draw on his gloves.

XVII.

THE BOUNDARY OF RIGHT.

THE reporter of the *Index* was shivering in the cab and the driver was stamping up and down the pavement, whipping his hands together as he waited impatiently for his fare.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long," said the lawyer as he ran down the steps and took his seat.

"Oh, it's all right," responded the driver cheerfully; "it's all the same, here or elsewhere. There are only so many hours, even on Christmas day."

"I am not so philosophical," growled the reporter. "If you meant this as a penance, Mr. Phelps, you made it severe."

"I was delayed longer than I expected to be," answered the other gravely; "but you have no right to complain."

"I know you are angry with me, Mr. Phelps," said the young man with boyish frankness, "and I am sorry for it; that's why I waited all this time. But really, you ought not to blame me; I was only acting in the line of professional duty, you know."

"That is never a duty which requires one to forget that he is a gentleman," was the severe reply.

"You refer to that little fib about coming from you?" laughed the young man. "Well, it was rather shaky, though it ought not to have taken any one in. There it was, as plain as print can make it, on the card I sent in: '*The Index*.' Anybody ought to know that nobody but a reporter would wear that brand. It won't do for a newspaper man to stand on as small a matter as that, Mr. Phelps. He'd get 'scooped' every day if he did."

"I do not refer to the falsehood," said the elder man, "though that is not a matter for a gentleman to boast of; but I do not care to engage in a casuistical discussion as to whether falsehood is or is not ever justifiable. In this case it clearly was not. Your purpose was even more unworthy than your conduct."

"Why do you say that?"

"You went there to gain, by deceit and false representation, knowledge in regard to a purely private matter which had already been court-cously refused when you asked it openly."

"One cannot expect to keep even personal matters secret in these days," said the young man sulkily. "People want to know what is going on, and demand that the newspaper

should tell them. That's our business. The time has gone by when a man could shut his castle's gate in the world's face and do what he chose within its walls. We don't live in the Middle Ages nowadays. The newspaper turns on the light and lets the world see what is being done. I am one of the servants of this great force, and cannot afford to 'get left.'"

The boy spoke confidently—almost boastfully.

"It makes no difference in what age we live," said the other calmly; "the line between private right and public privilege must always remain the same. A man has a right to keep his personal affairs to himself as long as he does no harm to others thereby."

"Certainly," was the jaunty response, "and others have a right to find them out, if they can!"

"It is not an indictable offense; if that is what you mean," was the cool reply.

"The newspaper would be mighty dry reading if we did not report any one's personal affairs."

"No doubt; and it is quite right that the newspaper should report personal matters, if they do not seek to pry into those which people do not desire to make public."

"People should not do things that will not

bear telling, if they do not want us to get hold of them."

"Yet every one does things which are not only harmless but even praiseworthy, the telling of which could only give sorrow and pain without accomplishing any possible good."

"Perhaps," responded the young man hesitantly, "but where shall we draw the line?"

"Whenever any one seeks to conceal an act which is evidently harmless in its nature, a gentleman will never seek to pry into it farther. When one passes that limit he becomes a mere gossip, worthy only of the contempt of honorable men."

"You think I had no right to inquire into the secret of this unusual gift?"

"If there is any secret—certainly not. The deed is of record; that is enough."

"But the man? People have a legitimate interest in men who do unusual things."

"A man has a right to avoid publicity if he desires, so long as the fact works no harm to others."

"Perhaps you are right, but how was I to know?"

"You would not have thought of sneaking into my house to learn the contents of the stocking my daughter hung in the chimney-corner, in the good old-fashioned way, last night."

"Probably not, for you would not have thought of concealing it."

"On the contrary, I did take especial pains to conceal it. As it happens, I wanted to make her a present of a few thousand dollars of bonds, and I took pains to have them registered in another name and then transferred to her, just to save her from this very annoyance of a newspaper report. Now that I have told you, I suppose you will feel justified in publishing the fact."

"Most certainly I shall not," said the reporter indignantly.

"Yet, when I told you that another matter could not be made public without injury, or at least annoyance, you still felt justified in seeking to ferret out the details, and even lying to attain your purpose."

"Well, you're not complimentary, anyhow," laughed the young man, "any more than Miss Collins was. You heard what she said, I suppose?"

"Yes; learning that you had come as my ambassador, I thought I had a right to hear what you would say in my name."

"Oh, of course; but isn't she a stunner? Have you known her long?"

"I have known her father for many years," said the lawyer indifferently.

"Oh, I don't care about her father, but Miss Collins—where has she been? How has she managed to live in Washington and not make a sensation?"

"She has been away at school for eight, perhaps ten, years."

"Oh, you know all about her then."

"I ought to," answered the lawyer with a smile. "My checks paid her bills."

"You don't say? And yet I never heard of her. Who is her father?"

"I thought you didn't care."

"Neither do I; but I would like to let her know I am something more than what she seemed to think me."

"You can easily do that."

"How?"

"By saying nothing in the *Index* concerning her or the matter on which you called."

"But if the other fellows should get hold of it—."

"You need not fear. I will answer for your having the earliest information, if it ever becomes proper to say anything. You may as well understand, too, that I hold the key of the situation; and I do not mind telling you that it would be the easiest matter in the world for you to run the *Index* into a libel suit which would cost more than many reporters."

"The *Index* does not scare easily," said the young man, coolly.

"And you are aware that I never give a caution, lightly," answered the lawyer with a quiet smile.

"Of course," said the reporter with a shrug; "and a row of that kind would lay me on the shelf. I understand all that." He paused a moment, then added: "I am sorry to have incurred your displeasure, Mr. Phelps, but how is a poor reporter to know what he may, and what he may not do?"

"The line between the gentleman and the gossip is not very hard to trace."

"You would call it the 'reportorial conscience,' I suppose?"

"I would call it the instinct of a gentleman; that fine old word is good enough and should not be allowed to go out of fashion."

"And how shall I regain your good will?" asked the reporter, contritely, as they neared the office.

"One shows himself most a man by making stepping-stones of his mistakes," answered the lawyer, extending his hand.

"Do you think Miss Collins could be induced to subscribe to that doctrine?" The young man's face flushed as he asked the question.

"I—I—hope so," said Mr. Phelps with a start.

Curiously enough it cost him an effort, though he could hardly have told why.

They drew up at the *Index* office and the young man alighted and ran up the steps to the editorial rooms.

XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED CALL.

HARDLY had the lawyer departed than the young lady whom he had twice visited that day, rang the bell and summoned her housekeeper. A woman with soft, white hair and a timid, apprehensive look, responded.

"You will get Uncle Prime's room ready, Mrs. Macey."

"Is he coming back?" asked the woman hesitantly.

"I look for him at any moment," answered the young lady in a tone of unconcealed delight.

"And he will have the room over the back parlor?"

"Cerainly—the one next to mine. The dear old man has cared for me so faithfully that I am never going to let him go out of my sight again, for a whole day at a time. He has given up that horrid boot-blackening business of his—sold it to the young man who works with him—and will have nothing to do now except to think he is taking care of me, while I, in fact look out for him."

"But, Miss Eva, would it not be better—I beg your pardon—" stammered the woman,—
"does Mr. Phelps know that you intend to give this—this old colored man the best room in the house?"

"What difference does it make whether he does or not!" exclaimed the young lady sharply. "This is my house—and I do not need anybody's instructions as to what I shall do in it!"

"So I 'spose, Miss Eva, but I promised Mr. Phelps I would advise you as if you was my own daughter, and never let you go wrong without speaking. I don't doubt but Uncle Prime is a good man, and you ought to be grateful to him for taking care of you and your property so many years—but you know, my dear, he—he's black!"

"Suppose he is. Haven't I a right to treat a man who has been more than a father to me, as well as I would a pet dog? Please to understand, Mrs. Macey, that he is to be treated with as much respect as the whitest man in the world. He will take his meals in his own room, because he insists on doing so—but otherwise he will be treated exactly as I should wish my father to be, were he under my roof."

"I'm sure, I haven't any objection, Miss Eva," said the housekeeper, "but—what will your friends say?"

"I haven't many—not in the city at least—and want none who would have me forget what I owe to this devoted old servant."

"As you please, Miss," said the housekeeper curtly, "but I can't help thinking that your father would rather you had given Uncle Pac the front room in the basement. I've no doubt he'd be more contented there, too. That and the kitchen is all he occupied when he lived here; he must have done his own cooking, too, by what I hear; and the girl says his things are all there yet, which I presume is true, for he hasn't given up the key. I've never seen the inside of it."

"What do you know about my father?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know much about him," answered the woman, meaningly.

"Do you know him?" the young lady repeated.

"Of course I don't *know* him; but don't you suppose his name is Collins: I happen to know something about the Collins family. You don't look like 'em—not a mite; though I must say you act enough like 'em to make up for it. But la, child, you ain't no Collins, more'n I am. If Mr. Phelps ain't your father, then it's somebody mighty close to him. But whoever 'tis, he means to take care of you and do right by

you. People don't give girls care and schoolin', and end up with such presents as you've had to-day, unless they've got some interest in them."

"How did you learn these things?"

"Why, you told me about the present, yourself, honey!"

"Yes; but the other things?"

"How? Why, this same old black man, Prime, told me the day Mr. Phelps sent me here. He didn't exactly say so, of course—but you jest depend upon it, Miss Eva, this old nigger hain't lost nothin' takin' care of you. He's feathered his nest—you make sure of that! The front basement room's plenty good enough for him—plenty good enough. It's my opinion the best thing about him is his name. I don't see where he got that, nor what makes every one that comes near him think he's such an extr'ordinary good man. *I* think he's deceitful—that's what I think!"

"Mrs. Macey," said the young mistress with cool decision, "I have listened to you, because I wished to know exactly how far your imagination would carry you. While it is true enough that I did not, until to-day, know my parentage, it is now no longer a mystery. I know who is my father. I am his only child and his lawful heir. You see what injustice your sus-

picians have done to a good man. Go now, and prepare the room for Uncle Prime, as I directed."

"Of course, Miss," said the elder woman with curious submissiveness, "it's for you to say. I promised faithfully to advise you—and I've done it. I hain't no call to do no more. I'm sure it's very nice of you to be so good to an old colored man. There ain't many would think of such a thing, and I'm afraid you'll rue it. There ain't ever any good comes of tryin' to make white folks out of niggers. White folks may git to be niggers, but niggers can't ever git to be white folks. It may seem to be all right for a time, but in the end there won't nothin' but misery and misfortin' come on't. That's what I honestly b'lieve, Miss Eva, and I ought to know. That's the reason I said what I did. I don't want to hurt you nor do any one harm, but I do want to keep you from doing what might bring you tears. God knows I do!" said the woman passionately. "I've done enough harm to want to do nothing but good the rest of my life, and if God'll help me I will!"

She looked upward for a moment as if breathing a prayer, while the tears rolled down her face; then bending suddenly, caught the girl's hands, kissed them, pressed them to her heart, and rushed out of the room.

The young lady gazed after her with a puzzled frown on her brow, shook her head, and then went and stood by the window looking out upon the broad avenue, on which the throng seemed to increase as the short winter day drew to a close. The door suddenly flew open and a servant-girl burst into the room.

"Miss Eva! Miss Eva! they wants you at the telephone—right away!"

"What is it?" she asked, noting the girl's excitement.

"I don't know, Miss,—somethin' 'bout Unc Prime. Dat's what Mrs. Macey said. She was takin' it, yer know, an' all of a sudden she yells out, 'Prime! Unc Prime!' jes so; an' down she drops in a faint, an' so I runs fer you."

The young lady went into the hall where the telephone was attached. She found the house-keeper half-unconscious beside the instrument, her apron thrown over her head, moaning brokenly.

"What is it, Mrs. Macey?" she asked in alarm.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know! Something's wrong. There's always something wrong where I am! O Lord! O Lord!"

Miss Collins took the instrument from her hand and placed it to her own ear.

"Hello!" she called.

"Hello!" came the reply.

"Did you call No. — M. Street?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Central Police Station. Who am I talking with?"

"Miss Collins."

"Miss Eva Collins?"

"Yes; what do you want?"

"A colored man has just been brought in badly hurt."

"What is his name?"

"He is unconscious, but has an envelope in his pocket directed to Miss Eva Collins, and addressed to your number. That's why we called you. He's an old, bald-headed man. What?"

"Nothing—go on!"

"The chief thought he might be your servant, at least you might want the letter. Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes, he belongs here."

"All right! We'll send the letter. What? Wait a minute."

She could only hear a confused murmur. Soon the same voice called again.

"He has just been identified as Prime—the boot-black at the 'Best House.' We have sent an officer there to inquire about him."

"Is he able to be moved?"

"The doctor says he should be taken to the hospital without delay."

"Is he dangerously injured?"

"He cannot tell—it is serious."

"Have him sent here at once!"

"But the doctor says—"

"Send him here!"

"Unless you are willing to undertake a great deal of trouble—"

"Send him here!"

"All right, ma'am; you understand he would receive good attention at the hospital, and you could—"

"Send him here!"

"All right. They are taking him to the ambulance now. He is reviving! Good-by!"

"I say, Captain," she heard before the connection was severed, "did you ever see the like of that! An aristocratic white woman insisting on taking care of a banged-up old nigger!"

She rang the bell and called the Central Telephone Exchange.

"Hello!"

"Is that the Central Exchange?"

"Yes."

"Give me Mr. Willard Phelps."

"Home or office?"

"Home."

"All right!"

She waited a moment.

"Hello!"

"Is that Mr. Phelps?"

"Yes."

She recognized the voice.

"Uncle Pac is badly hurt. Will you order a physician here at once—one you have full confidence in?"

"What is the injury?"

"I do not know. Ambulance is on the way here from the police station."

"All right! Will call the doctor and come myself within an hour. If needed before that time call me!"

"La sakes!" said the servant, who stood gnawing the corner of her apron and gazing at her young mistress in amazement. "She do beat anything!"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Eva," sobbed the housekeeper in deep humiliation. "I know I oughtn't to have given way so, but I can't hear of nobody bein' hurt without all breakin' down,—never since *he* was killed! I know it's foolish after so long a time but I can't help it—indeed I can't! And then to think I was wishing this old man Prime was dead; so't you wouldn't have no bother with him! I did, Miss Eva—I did! Oh, what makes me so

wicked—always wicked even when I try to be good!”

“There, there, Mrs. Macey!” said the girl, placing her hand soothingly on the housekeeper’s head. “Don’t give way now! I’m sure you meant no harm! We must get ready to take care of him when he comes!”

“Not *you*, Miss Eva! Not you!” exclaimed the woman, springing to her feet. “You mustn’t never do that; you *can’t*! Let me do it! Let me do it for my sin, Miss Eva! There ain’t no better nurse in Washington than I am!”

The woman was wild with self-reproachful anxiety.

“There! There!” said the girl, putting her arm about the woman’s neck and drawing the gray head to her bosom, while she patted the throbbing temples and wiped the tears from her flushed face. “You shall take care of him—and I will help you!”

XIX.

A PROMISE FULFILLED.

THE ambulance and the surgeon arrived almost at the same instant. Miss Collins met the men with the stretcher as they came up the steps.

"This way," she said, as she went before them up the broad stairs. The physician waited in the hall to divest himself of his outer garments. The chamber to which she led the bearers was a spacious one. They looked around at the rich furniture and down at the dark face upon the stretcher, questioningly.

"This is a very luxurious sick-room," remarked the hospital attendant, cautiously, "very luxurious for a—a servant."

"It is none too good," replied the lady, with an angry flash of the eye. "Lay him here," pointing to the open bed. The housekeeper stood clinging to the footboard gazing at the bare black head that sank with a groan into the white pillows. Eva picked up the knitted cap from the stretcher and restored it to its place. It was not the first time she had done this

service. In spite of her self-control the tears fell upon the dark, upturned face. She took her handkerchief and wiped them away. The bearers folded up the stretcher and started to leave—half doubtfully. The physician whispered to the hospital attendant who was in charge. He shook his head and nodded toward the young lady. Addressing her, the doctor said, hesitantly:

"I was sent by the Hon. Willard Phelps; have I missed the number?"

"This is your patient."

"Do you know me—Dr. Holbrook?"

"I do not; I am almost a stranger in the city, and asked Mr. Phelps to send me—the best."

"Ah—quite so."

He had followed the stretcher up the steps. Understanding he was to attend upon a wounded man, he naturally concluded that it was his patient who was being taken from the ambulance, and had been staggered when he saw the color of his face. Now, satisfied that there had been no mistake, he proceeded to diagnose the case. The bearers and the attendant went slowly down the stairs, the servant following them. The housekeeper took the young lady's arm and led her away.

"The injury is nervous rather than physical," was the verdict of the physician after he had

concluded his examination. "There seems to have been a previous injury of the spine which has been affected by concussion."

He made this report to the young lady in the parlor a half-hour afterwards. The housekeeper had been placed in charge of the sick-room.

"He will recover?" she asked anxiously.

"It is hard to say. He is still under the influence of the opiate, hypodermically administered by the hospital attendant who accompanied the ambulance. He was suffering greatly, it seems,—talking incoherently, they said. One can hardly tell what was his condition or the extent of the injury. It is getting to be an almost universal practice with these people to use an injector. It is a fascinating instrument and saves them trouble. When the effect wears off we shall be able to judge better as to his condition. It seems probable that paraplegia may supervene—partial paralysis, you understand."

"You will remain?"

"I will look in about ten; he is in good hands. Your housekeeper is a very efficient nurse. Nothing more can be done now."

The physician sat, with his gloves in one hand and his hat in the other, during this conversation. He was a man of notable appearance—of strong, sharp features, his abundant

gray hair contrasting oddly with his jet beard and alert black eyes.

"You feel a great deal of interest in this case?" he inquired after a moment's silence.

"Very great, indeed."

"An old servant, I suppose?"

"He has been with us ever since I can remember."

"Indeed? Do you know anything of his history—physically, I mean?"

"I do not remember that he has ever been ill."

"And his appearance?"

"Has always been the same."

"Your memory of him extends—how far back?"

"Fifteen years or more."

"And you have noted no change?"

"None whatever."

"He has evidently been wounded at some time."

"I think, he was a soldier."

"Does he receive a pension?"

"I do not know about that, but I am sure he was a soldier."

"Ah—I will take another look at him."

The physician went slowly up the stairs with a puzzled look upon his face. The police report told him nothing of the case. No one had

seen the man fall. He had been found lying prone upon the Avenue. There were no contusions, except a slight one on the head and a cut on the right hand. The physician concluded that he had been knocked down by a horse, and that the driver had managed to avoid touching him with the wheels. The shock had been severe, and the signs of former injuries had led him to expect the results he had indicated.

The housekeeper was a comely woman for her age, with a feeble, apprehensive look, as if trouble had destroyed what might have been beauty in her young days. She sat holding the sick man's hand, and started like a guilty creature when she heard the physician's step, letting the hand fall by the bedside. There was only a small night-lamp in the room, and he seemed not to notice her confusion.

"Will you turn up the lights, Mrs. Macey?" he said, laying his hat and gloves on the table and going to the bedside.

She turned on the electric light. The doctor folded back the clothing of the bed and made a hasty examination of the patient's hip and right leg.

"Exactly: gun-shot wounds—from the rear, too? She is probably right," he said, speaking to himself.

"Have those old hurts anything to do with

his condition now?" the housekeeper asked in a scared voice. She was standing by the table in the middle of the room.

"Perhaps," he returned, glancing sharply at her. "Do you know anything about them?"

"Oh, no—that is—I've heard—I've only been here a short time—a few weeks."

The woman flushed and stammered under the doctor's penetrating gaze.

"If I knew what they were and when received, it might help me," he said tentatively.

The woman shook her head. The doctor pushed back the clothing on the patient's chest displaying a small black crucifix and a little flat parcel suspended from the neck. He stood so that his own form intervened between the nurse and the patient.

"Strange!" he muttered to himself, "how many of the negroes are turning Catholics. Will you bring me a little vinegar?" he added aloud.

The woman left the room to procure it. As soon as she was gone the doctor cut the string by which the parcel was suspended, and opening it quickly made a hasty examination of its contents.

When he had done, a puzzled look came over his face. He stepped back a little way and carefully scrutinized the face of his patient, holding

his hand above his eyes to screen them from the light as he did so. Then he took a small magnifying glass from his pocket and passed it quickly over the patient's hand and nails; pulled down the lids and examined the strange, dark eyes; scrutinized the scalp and regarded attentively the side of the face. The woman returned with a small pitcher of vinegar, a pretty, glass-stoppered little jug which she carried as if impressed by its diminutiveness. The physician took it carelessly, and, pouring a few drops in his hand, rubbed them on the patient's forehead and then examined it again with the glass.

"You think he will live?" she asked.

"There is no present danger. You remember my directions?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

The woman instinctively dropped a little curtsey, and turned to arrange the bedclothes. The doctor saw it and smiled.

"There is nothing more. Good-night."

He went away shaking his head.

XX.

THE FIAT OF SCIENCE.

“WELL, I vow,” the doctor said to himself as he went down the steps, “that little housekeeper is an oddity. I haven’t seen a *white* woman drop a curtsy before in forty years. But the young lady is a thoroughbred. There are not many who would give such attention to an old servant—such a vulture-headed old creature as that, too. He can’t have been a very valuable servant, either, for he has been a boot-black for years, that I know. I wonder—can it be possible he has been supporting this establishment? I believe that’s the key to the mystery. Well, well, queer things *do* happen—life is made up of them in fact. Talk about fiction! Faugh! it’s stale to a grown man who has had his eyes and ears open!”

He glanced keenly about him as he went down the stairs and let himself out.

“Ah! here you are,” he exclaimed as he came face to face with Mr. Phelps, on reaching the pavement. “Just the man I wanted

to see. What can you tell me about this old fellow in here?"

"Who? Prime?"

"Of course."

"How is he?"

"Oh, well enough,—that is, for the present. What his condition will be when he recovers consciousness, it is hard to tell."

"Is he badly hurt?"

"I don't know—well, yes—that is, he may be. If I knew something about what he has been, I could guess better what his chances will be. Can you help me?"

"Wait until I see Miss Eva, and I will ride back with you."

"All right—make haste!"

It was hardly a moment before the lawyer returned and seated himself by the physician's side.

"Well, what do you know? In the first place, who is that girl?"

"Miss Collins?"

"Certainly. I mean what family does she belong to? What stock is she? I don't suppose I know everybody in the city—certainly not in the country—but I know the old stocks around here, and I do not recognize the type. Yet she does not seem like a new importation."

"She is—and she is not."

"From the South—I'll wager on that."

"And lose—at least you would be only half right. Her father was a Western man, as I understand, who settled in South Carolina at the close of the war. Somehow, you and I do not need to inquire how—he made himself obnoxious to the people of the region where he lived, and 'disappeared,' as they say; in plain English was killed. The widow was left with her children on the plantation the husband had bought and improved. After a time, the youngest, a daughter, disappeared also. All search for her proved unavailing, not a trace could be found. At the first opportunity the terrified mother sold the plantation and fled herself, with the other child."

"And this boot-black—Prime?"

"He was with the girl's father in the service, and remained with him afterward on the plantation; that is his story. He seems to have been greatly attached to him, but somehow distrustful of the wife. After the father's death he stole the little girl, who was the father's favorite, brought her here, and has not only cared for her but has acquired considerable property, taking the title always in the father's name, so that she might think she took rather by inheritance than as a gratuity from him."

"He seems to have been very considerate."

"No parent could have been more so. He even used my checks to pay her school bills that she might not think herself under obligation to him."

"And you advised this?"

"I did not know it until to-day. He has been accustomed for a dozen years to exchange checks with me in order to conceal his identity—to cover up his tracks, as one may say. I think he was distrustful of everybody else—never wanted any one to know that he had money. I doubt if in all that time he has ever signed a check I did not fill out, and usually they have been made payable to me, I giving my checks for them in such amounts as he desired. This is the way all his purchases have been made, and I knew nothing whatever of his support of this young lady, or even of her existence, until within a few months."

"This is his account of himself?"

"Of course."

"And the young lady—how much does she know of this?"

"Just what I have told you."

"No more?"

"Well, she has her own memory."

"How old was she when he stole her?"

"Very young—I judge about three years."

"Has she any memory of her mother?"

"Only a very indistinct one."

"H'm," muttered the doctor knitting his brows as he glanced up at an electric light that flashed and spluttered as they came within its zone of pallid radiance, "a queer case—a very queer case!"

"The man's success has been remarkable, otherwise I do not know as there is anything very strange in it," said the lawyer, thoughtfully pursing up his lips as if rendering an opinion on a mooted point.

"Humph! You think so? Well, here we are at my house. Come in and let us talk it over a little."

"I don't know as I ought—" hesitantly.

"Oh, come along!" said the doctor, standing on the sidewalk and speaking with that imperiousness which a man uses only towards familiar friends. "You have told me what you know and I want to tell you what I have found out—about this man Prime, I mean."

The lawyer yielded; they went up the steps together; the doctor let himself in with his latch-key and led the way at once to his consulting-room.

"Let me look at my slate," he said briskly. "The Scripture may be a sufficient guide for other people's footsteps, but the doctor and

the politician can never dispense with the slate. This is first-rate," he continued, touching an electric bell. "I rarely find myself without imperative calls at this time of day, but Christmas crowds even disease into the background. James," he added, as a servant appeared, "I shall be engaged for an hour. Come in here, Mr. Phelps."

He led the way into his private room, library rather than office, a nook reserved for friends rather than patients, though the atmosphere of the profession was not wanting in it. When they had enjoyed for a few moments the warmth of the glowing grate, the doctor said:

"This is not the first time our tracks have crossed in searching out the life-lines of other people, Mr. Phelps. If I remember right we have now and then treated one another to a surprise, each in his own way. The fact is that law and medicine lie a good deal closer together than most people suppose, but I doubt if one ever imagined any bit of detective analysis such as I am going to show you now. You have told me what you know about Prime, and would probably be surprised if I should tell you that I have found out a good deal more."

"I don't know," said the lawyer meditatively,

"the world is not so large as it once was, and I know of no man who is likely to learn more of another's history than his physician."

"But I am not Prime's physician—never heard his name, except as a boot-black at the Best House, until to-night. You have been his attorney for years, but I am not sure I have not learned more about him in one visit than you have found out in all the time you have known him."

There was evident satisfaction in the doctor's tone, and his eyes twinkled with enjoyment as he spoke.

"Possibly," answered the lawyer with a quiet shrug. "Suppose you open your pack, however, and show your goods before you extol their quality."

"All right, I will," responded the other with a laugh. "In the first place, the man's name is not Pactolus Prime at all!"

"Very likely," said the lawyer composedly,—
"There are several millions of Negroes in this country whose title to the names they bear would be very hard to sustain. You must remember, doctor, that the name is altogether an assumed and not an inherited attribute to the Negro, in this country at least."

"But he is not a Negro!" exclaimed the doctor with emphasis.

.

"Indeed!" said the lawyer with a smile. "That is a different matter. I should fancy you would much more easily provoke an argument on that proposition than on the other, since you will hardly find any one who would be likely to agree with you."

"But I can prove it," asserted the physician stoutly.

"By expert testimony, I suppose?" answered the lawyer with a touch of sarcasm.

"Well, yes," said the other, "I know what you would say, 'The evidence of things hoped for and the testimony of things *not* seen!' But the scientific expert cannot be sneered out of court, much less out of the forum of reason. But in this case, as it happens, my testimony is historical rather than scientifically inferential."

"I thought you said you did not know Prime until to-day."

"Neither did I, except casually. The *man* Pactolus Prime, as he calls himself, I never knew except as I may have heard him mentioned as the best boot-black in the city; but the *body* the man inhabits I have known for a dozen years or more."

"Ah, you have examined him before?"

"Never; but that body is part of the common property of our profession."

"Never was such another, I suppose?"

"Never."

"Indeed!" There was unmistakable incredulity in the lawyer's tone.

"That shows how little a lawyer, even a great lawyer, knows," said the doctor, testily. "If a bank cashier had shown you a counterfeit bill and told you that it was the work of a certain engraver, you would not have thought it at all surprising, nor have questioned the accuracy of his deduction, though he had never seen the forger, nor a specimen of his workmanship; but when I tell you that I recognize a certain human body which I never saw before, because it is one distinctly known to the whole body of my profession, you at once grow incredulous?"

"You see, doctor, *my* profession has learned by sad experience not to put entire reliance upon flesh-marks and—experts!" answered the other with a smile.

"All right," said the physician, shaking his finger threateningly at his companion, "I shall punish you for your incredulity. Let me go on. The man's real name is *Smith*!"

"Why do you think so?" asked the lawyer with a frown.

"Aha!" exclaimed the physician gleefully, "I touched the raw then, didn't I? Hold

on ; I'm not through yet. The young lady up there, Miss Collins, is his daughter !”

The lawyer turned away with an expression of impatience.

“You don't believe it?” asked the physician.

“It is a very pretty bit of imagination, doctor. Several knights of the lancet have recently gone into fiction ; why don't you try it? I think you would succeed.”

“We cannot match the law in the number of our novelists, nor can we boast of making up in quality what we lack in quantity. Old Sir Walter put you too far ahead to be distanced by any other profession. But I thank you for the compliment, all the same ; it is a tribute to my skill in the use of facts,” said the doctor in the same bantering tone.

“Facts! You surely would not advertise such a series of improbabilities as a story ‘founded on fact,’ even remotely?”

“That's like a lawyer's self-complacency! What are facts? Who deals with facts? the man whose premises are found in flesh and blood or the one who guesses at results from motive and circumstances?”

The lawyer made no reply.

“Now for the proof,” resumed the physician after a moment's pause. “You shall fol-

low me, step by step, and judge the correctness of my conclusions. Is that fair?"

His listener nodded assent, and he proceeded :

"Well then, here is the first link in my chain of evidence." He snatched an *Index Rerum* from a side case of his desk and turned its pages over rapidly until he found the term, "Depilation." Handing the book to the lawyer, he pointed to this word and said: "You will observe that I haven't been tampering with the witness. That minute was made a dozen years ago and I have hardly seen it since. Now, let me get the work referred to, and we shall see what you think of my opening; that is what you lawyers call it, I believe."

He went to a book-case and ran his fingers swiftly along a set of works which showed evidences of frequent use. Taking one out, he opened it at a particular place, cast his eyes down the page, and handed it to the lawyer.

"Read that," he said.

The other took the book, put on his *pince-nez* glasses, glancing first at the title with the habitual caution of his profession, as if to determine its value as an authority, and then carefully but rapidly perused an article entitled: "A Curious Case of *Argyria* and *Depilation*."

In the mean time, the physician had turned to his letter-file, and after some search extracted from it a paper, with which he returned to his seat and waited until the lawyer finished reading.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Very curious indeed," answered the lawyer, "and very interesting; but it strikes me there is a pretty wide gap between your premise and conclusion. You have evidently jumped to the conviction that Dr. Darling's patient and your own are identical. There seems to me no sufficient means of identification. I suppose you do not claim that he is the only man in the country affected with argyria?"

"Not the only one, of course; but the chances are about a thousand millions to one that there were ever two people who would fill the description there given."

"I don't understand why," said the lawyer, biting his lip and contracting his brows, "if such a result is produced by specific means in one case, there should not be a thousand other cases just like it?"

"Of course you cannot; neither can I; but we of the medical profession know as a fact that one of the most difficult things in the world is to duplicate either physical conditions

or physical results. Now, this thing we call argyria is one of the rarest forms of medical resultants. There are probably hardly a score of cases in the world to-day—perhaps not as many. And each one of these no doubt differs from every other case in intensity and shade, just as one old master's coloring differs from another's. The remedy from whose action argyria results is not a rare one,—at least it was not a few years ago; yet this particular result is very unusual. It is a mysterious effect of remedy or disease, one or both, upon the *pigmentum nigrum*, which occurs only under peculiar conditions and in rare cases. What these conditions are no one knows. But you will observe that this was not only a remarkable, uniform and striking case of argyria, giving the man, as Dr. Darling says, 'the hue, upon close inspection, of newly fractured cast-iron, which,' he adds, 'was somewhat dulled by exposure, becoming considerably darker upon the exposed surfaces, as the hands and face'; but you will observe that he goes further and alludes to the discoloration of the whites of the eyes. Now this is perhaps even rarer than argyria itself. I have myself seen it but once, and a distinguished oculist has recently gone so far as to declare it to be due, in the rare cases in which it does exist, not to excess-

ive pigmentation, but to deterioration of the sclerotic membrane itself. The important fact to us is, that it existed in Dr. Darling's case. Have you ever seen your client's eyes—without his glasses, I mean?"

"Once."

"You know, then, what I mean?"

The lawyer nodded.

"Now, how many chances are there that these two rare phenomena would concur in another human being?"

"Not a great many, it is true," said the lawyer "but then—"

"Hold on! You might as well save yourself the trouble of stating that argument. You won't dare make it when I am through!"

"You will observe," he continued, "that Dr. Darling says that complete depilation ensued very rapidly upon the patient's recovery. It was this which especially attracted my attention to the case. I have always had a strange fancy for this subject. I am satisfied that some time science will discover not only *how* the hair grows, but why it ceases to grow, and be able to treat depilation as a disease with a reasonable certainty of success. I hoped once that such advance might come in my day, and—well, in fact, I hoped I might be the discoverer. It is a dream that comes,

I suppose, to every lover of his profession, that he may do something that shall give his name a sort of an immortality in connection with its history, such an immortality as Harvey has won in ours and Blackstone in yours."

"They are hardly parallel cases; but go on, I see your meaning," said the lawyer.

"Well, I had not quite gotten over this fancy when that case fell under my eye, and I wrote to Dr. Darling about it. That was years ago, but of course I kept the letter because it had a bearing on my hobby. In this letter he reaffirms that the depilation was complete, hair, beard, eyebrows, even the eyelashes. I examined Prime to-night with a glass—not a very strong one, it is true"—he added, taking the case from his pocket and handing it to his listener—"but the light was good, and by passing it over the back of your hand you will be able to guess whether I could be mistaken, when I say there is not a shadow of a hair on him."

The lawyer examined his own hand through the magnifier and nodded assent to the other's words.

"You may have seen one—perhaps two or three—cases of absolute denudation; but you know yourself how rare they are. As if to cut off all possibility of doubt, however, not

only did these three among the rarest of physical conditions—argyria, sclerotic discoloration and depilation—obtain in Dr. Darling's case, but the man, when he was first called to see him, was suffering from two gunshot wounds, one about the fourth lumbar vertebra, from which he removed the ball, that no doubt produced the nervous symptoms—the involuntary muscular contractions he speaks of—which caused him to give the nitrate of silver in such stiff, old-fashioned doses as to produce such a beautiful case of argyria. This may have been helped on—probably was—by the sturdy doses of “blue mass” which the country practitioner, accustomed to heroic remedies and tough subjects, used to reduce the febrile excitement resulting from the patient's wounds. Mercury often has an effect similar in character, but less in degree, to that produced by silver-poisoning. The other wound was a fracture of the inner surface of the head of the tibia, to which the doctor says he paid little attention, as he expected his patient to die of the one in the region of the spine—as indeed he had good reason to anticipate. The result was that the right knee and hip were both affected so that the patient, though he recovered, dragged this foot behind the other in walking. There it is now. Never since the vulture-

headed Thoth disappeared from human thought was a man so unmistakably marked. I would have no more hesitation in swearing that this man 'Prime' is Dr. Darling's patient than I would in testifying to your presence opposite me now."

"I should think you would be safe in doing so, Doctor," said the lawyer thoughtfully; "but I do not see how you arrive at the conclusion that either of them is named Smith." There was a twinkle in the lawyer's eye as he thus laid his finger on the weak point of his friend's reasoning.

"Well," answered the doctor with a laugh, "that is nothing like so clearly ascertained as the other; though the testimony in reference to it happens to be direct rather than circumstantial. Dr. Darling says in this letter that his patient's name was Smith—P. P. Smith. He did not give it in his report, he says, because it might have endangered the man's life. He takes occasion to say, too, that the charge against him, of falsely pretending to be a white man was true, stating this on the authority of a former master, who afterward took great interest in the settlement of his affairs—or his wife's affairs, rather."

"Humph!" was the lawyer's expressive ejaculation.

"So?" exclaimed the doctor lifting his eyebrows. "I hadn't thought of that. Well all this is strengthened and confirmed by a curious thing that came in my way to-night. Do you see that?"

He laid a small parcel on the table as he spoke. It was only a rubber tobacco-pouch with one side pushed into the other and a string run through the loop thus made.

"What is it?" asked the lawyer, cautiously pinching it and turning it over as he spoke.

"That is what I asked myself an hour ago, and I am half-ashamed to tell you what course I took to satisfy my curiosity. A physician does not often meddle with what does not concern him, and I would never have thought of doing what I did, if I had not supposed my patient to be a colored man."

"I don't see how that could affect the propriety of your action." said the lawyer coolly.

"Well, I found that parcel carefully strung around your client's neck. You know how addicted the colored people are to carrying charms and philters, and I supposed, of course, that I had gotten hold of something of that sort. So I tucked it into my pocket, and when I had an opportunity, stole a look at it. I meant to have put it back where I found it, but the housekeeper, who by the way is per-

fectly jellied with apprehension on this man's account, wouldn't give me a chance, and I am glad now, that I didn't. What do you suppose it contains? Nothing but papers which do not prove any of my conclusions, yet make them all indubitable."

He opened the pouch and took out some scraps of paper carefully pasted together in places where they had worn through.

"This," said he, opening the first, "is the discharge of Color-sergeant P. P. Smith, who was enlisted as a private in the —th Indiana Volunteer Infantry, near Shell Mound, Tenn., on the 17th day of June, A. D. 1862, and was discharged 'for promotion,' on the 6th day of December, A. D. 1863, at Chattanooga. Now what do you think of that?" asked the physician exultantly. "Dr. Dowling's patient was named P. P. Smith; the girl's father was a federal soldier; this patient has carefully hidden about his person the discharge from the military service of P. P. Smith; *ergo*, what shall I conclude?"

"You have certainly made out a very strong *prima facie* case," said the lawyer seriously.

"*Prima facie*, man! What would you call conclusive?" exclaimed the doctor excitedly.

"The law," answered the attorney gravely, "usually demands a motive, and I think you

would find it hard to find one in this case to fit your hypothesis."

"There I confess you are right," said the physician rising and beginning to walk impatiently to and fro. "That a Negro should wish to be thought white is natural enough. I have heard hundreds of them declare they would be willing to be flayed alive, if they could be white afterward. And indeed, I do not blame them. But why a white man should wish to be thought a Negro, I confess I cannot understand. I suppose you or I would rather not be, than be black. I cannot think of anything that would induce the meanest white man in the country to permit himself to be considered a colored man unless it were to avert suspicion of a crime; can you?"

"I have never known such a case," answered the lawyer gravely.

"Except this one, you mean," said the doctor sharply.

"I make no exceptions," was the composed reply.

XXI.

"AND FATE AT LENGTH WAS KIND."

THE physician and the lawyer looked into each other's eyes in silence for a moment. Then the former spoke:

"I confess I cannot make it out; can you?"

"The question is not whether I *can* resolve your doubts, doctor, but whether I *ought* to do so."

"Oh, very well," said the other petulantly. "That is your affair, of course. You won't deny, however, that I have spotted my man, even if I haven't solved the whole mystery?"

"I am not called upon to admit or deny anything, Doctor," blandly rejoined the other. "Have you any objection to telling me what is the nature of the other paper you found upon your patient?"

"I suppose I ought to be as cautious as you," was the reply, "but as it happens this has nothing to do with the case. It is just a newspaper clipping which no one could have any interest in perusing. It was probably used merely to wrap around the discharge, which

was carefully folded in it. There it is. You will see that it is an advertisement and a clipping from the *Tuscumbia Times* of June 3, 1862."

The doctor handed a loosely rolled bit of paper to the other as he spoke. The lawyer adjusted his glasses and read :

"A shocking tragedy occurred at Briar Hill, the well-known plantation of the late Hon. McQueen Collins, on Sunday evening last. A negro boy murderously assaulted his young master, Captain Junius Collins, who is now lying at the point of death in consequence. It is supposed the difficulty arose because his master attempted to correct a colored girl with whom the boy had become enamored. Captain Collins was severely beaten about the head with some blunt instrument, supposed to have been a fence-picket, as one was found near the scene of the rencontre stained with blood. He has been unconscious most of the time since, but hopes are now entertained of his recovery.

"Thus far no trace has been found of his assailant. It is thought he will try to get into the lines of the Federal army, and he may endeavor to go North as a white man, as he shows very little trace of color and is remarkably intelligent, being able to read and write. His conduct is another instance of the folly of over-indulgence. He has always been more a companion than a slave of his young master, who was very fond of displaying his unlawful

acquirements to special friends, and would probably have set him free before this time had it not been for the Yankee invasion. The near approach of the Northern vandals undoubtedly inspired the boy with the pestiferous ideas of freedom which they so industriously disseminate among the slave population, and which no doubt led to this bloody tragedy. It is thought by some that he and the girl were trying to escape when they were intercepted by Captain Collins; others think the assault the result of jealousy on account of the girl's preference for her young master. She herself pretends entire ignorance of the affair. She is of very attractive appearance, and seems anxious for her master's recovery.

"The neighborhood is much excited, as the fugitive has long been regarded as a dangerous character by the owners of slaves in this region. There was a talk of giving him a taste of hickory more than a year ago, but Captain Collins interfered, so the matter was abandoned. If the fellow is taken he will receive short shrift at the hands of his pursuers, not only on his own account, but as a warning to the slave population who are, very generally, showing signs of disaffection."

The lawyer sat looking over his glasses at his friend, when he ceased reading the frayed and grimy strip of paper he still held in his hand, without speaking.

"Well," said the doctor banteringly, "you seem to have found food for thought, even in

that smudgy bit of paper accidentally wrapped around this old man's precious memento."

The attorney rose and walked back and forth across the floor, his great shapely head hanging forward on his breast and the gray hair shining like mingled silver and steel in the light of the incandescent arc, beneath which he paced to and fro.

"Doctor," he said at length, pausing to look down into his friend's face, "you were in the army, weren't you—the Federal army, I mean?"

"Yes, of course."

"I understand," said the other with a faint flush. "You mean it is where every one who counted himself a man in those days should have been. You are quite right, too; but I was not there. I lived inside the Confederate lines, and before I saw the matter in its true light, it was too late for me to hope to do much good, even if I had succeeded in getting out; so I waited for the end—a mere inert atom, counting for nothing in the great conflict. This has given me a great reverence for the men who fought for the right, and a sort of resentful pity for those who fought for the wrong; but it has left me ignorant of a good many things you must have come to regard as almost instinctive knowledge, such as the constitution and movement of your armies."

"I see," responded the physician with a quick nod.

"Now, does it strike you as at all singular that this P. P. Smith should have been mustered into an Indiana regiment 'near Shell Mound, Tenn.'?"

"It was unusual, perhaps, hardly singular. Men often journeyed to the front in order to take service in a favorite corps," was the reply.

"No doubt. So, too, I suppose a resident of that region who desired to enter the Union service would enlist in a Northern regiment?"

"Very seldom, I think. Such men would have been apt to join some of the various Southern regiments—so-called at least. Special inducements were offered to such recruits."

"Such a regiment, then, would afford a very secure hiding-place for—well, for a 'colored' boy, who was really white and could read and write, like this one who had the difficulty with his master?"

"It would have been an almost perfect sanctuary for him."

"And suppose, doctor, taking all we know—would it simplify matters, supply a motive, if we should say that the 'boy' who ran away was the soldier, P. P. Smith, who joined the Union army ten days later?"

"It would account for everything—every-

thing!" exclaimed the other emphatically, "and besides that—"

"Besides that," interrupted the lawyer severely, "besides that, doctor, it would destroy a brave man's hope—render vain the sacrifice of a whole life, if it were known."

"How so? I do not understand."

"Don't you see, Doctor, the man's whole life has been a struggle against the curse of color? First in his own person, and then for his child, he has labored to throw off the fetters of caste which civilization and Christianity has fastened on his race—the curse which makes the Negro a hopeless inferior and invokes the law of God—the religion of Jesus of Nazareth—to keep him so!"

"It is true," said the doctor, solemnly, "all too true; but what can I do to help or to hinder?"

"It is necessary for the success of his scheme, that he should live and die—a *Negro*!"

"I understand; but you don't expect me to kill him?"

"Not at all; but you can guard his secret."

"The physician is never a tattler."

"I did not mean that; I know you would not reveal what—what has been guessed; but if he should die?"

"Well?"

"He must be buried—as a *Negro*!"

"Ah, I understand," said the physician, catching his breath. "You mean the certificate?"

"Of course."

"I don't know." He gazed into the fire a moment and added: "I never did such a thing in my life."

"As what?"

"Make a false certificate."

"Who asks it?"

"Well, of course, there may be some little—admixture—"

"How much colored blood does it take to make a man a *Negro*?"

"I understand; a drop is enough—even a suspicion of a drop—for the world, society—perhaps for the Church; but medically, scientifically—" He shook his head. "You see," he added, "I have always been accustomed to tell the truth professionally, so far as I know it, at least."

"Or have reason to believe, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"And have you not reason to believe that this man is what is known and termed a colored man? There is Dr. Darling, you know, and—"

"I believe I have. At least I'll risk it for

once, giving him the benefit of the doubt of which he himself took advantage. After all, a physician is not bound to know more of a man's pedigree than he himself declares. I give you my word, that if your client dies on my hands he shall be buried *as a nigger*, so far as I am concerned at least. But how about the others?"

"His wishes will be law to them."

"Is it possible that this man Collins—or any of the family—"

"I will answer for them," interrupted the lawyer. He opened and shut his right hand as he spoke, as if clutching another's throat.

"Indeed!" said the physician, catching the suggestion. "Curious he chose that name for the girl, isn't it? Why do you suppose he did so?"

"Family pride, mostly. It was the name she should have been entitled to, and despite its aristocratic quality, has probably never been worn by one who deserved so well of the country as he."

"Dear me! dear me!" said the doctor, petulantly. "I thought when slavery was abolished there would be an end of all these things—questions of color, I mean; but really, it seems as if they would never disappear."

"Doctor," said the lawyer solemnly, "we both claim to be true men and Christians. We may as well recognize the fact that slavery was but the seeding: the harvest is just begun!"

"And when will it end?"

"When right is established and wrong is forgotten!"

"A long time to wait for a cure," said the physician with a shrug.

"So much the more need that the remedy be not delayed."

"The remedy? Ah, my friend, we who deal with the body have trouble enough with remedies,—but for the soul, for the body politic—what specific is there?"

"There is but one."

"And that—"

Before the lawyer could reply, the telephone bell in the consulting-room sounded a sharp alarm. Both men started and looked in each other's faces with apprehension. The physician hurried to the instrument, and the lawyer standing in the inner room listened anxiously to the one-sided conversation which was addressed to the office-wall.

"Hello!"

"Yes."

"All right."

There was a moment's pause, and then he heard the doctor's voice again.

"Hello?"

"Yes; who is this?"

"What?"

"You don't say?"

"Very well; I'll send him. Good-by."

He hung the instrument on its hook and returned moodily to his friend.

"Well?"

"It's all over."

"Poor fellow!"

"It is best so. I knew it could not be long, but did not expect it quite so soon. He was worn out, you see—the fight had been too much for him. It was a very interesting case, though, and I would liked to have studied it more at leisure."

He sat down at his desk and drew toward him a pad of printed blanks.

"Are you going with me?" asked the lawyer as he drew on his overcoat.

"I may as well," was the reply as the certificate was speedily filled out. "Do you know his age?" The lawyer shook his head. "Look at the discharge; that will give us a clue."

The lawyer put on his glasses and read the creased and worn document once more.

"Twenty-four? That would make forty-nine! Phelps, he was a good ten years younger than either of us and looked thirty years older! He must have had a good constitution too; but such things as he endured have to be paid for. Men live fast who suffer, and he died of old age as surely as if his years had been fourscore."

"You do not think it was the injury, then?"

"Injury? Yes, such an injury as stops a watch when the pivots are worn out—a jar that disengages the wheels; that was all. There it is."

He pushed the certificate across the desk. It was endorsed:

Pactolus Prime, Colored.

Age, Seventy Years.

Cause, General Debility.

"I've done my part, you see. If the truth breaks through that crust and causes trouble to those whom he lived and lied so long to save, it's not my fault. It is my opinion they have only to maintain a prudent silence to be regarded as ornaments of the best society and allowed to go to heaven, side by side with the richest and most exemplary Christians of the city. Queer, isn't it, that a lie should be the

only key that can open to such deserving souls the doors of a really respectable church, and give them the *entrée* of respectable homes?"

The bells rang out the closing hours of Christmas, as the lawyer folded the certificate and put it in his pocket.

XXII.

RETURN OF PROCESS.

IT was the day after Christmas. It was very late when Mr. Phelps reached his office. He placed his hat and coat upon the rack; read in an absent-minded way the memorandum of the day's engagements his clerk had prepared for him; opened a drawer of his desk; took out a bundle of papers, which he untied and examined, more as if to refresh his memory as to its contents than for any other purpose, and then went and stood before the fire. There was a thoughtful frown upon his brow, and he bit one side of his under lip, now and then, as if greatly perplexed. The day was cold, but as bright as the preceding one had been stormy. The streets were thronged. The Christmas festivities had not ended. The crowds were very gay, as beseemed a Christian people after such a holiday. He watched them through the window meditatively, as if the sights awakened unpleasant thoughts.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come," he said absently.

"Ah, Major," he exclaimed, as the one-armed attorney entered. "How do you do this morning? And the Madame—I hope the Christmas was a pleasant one to her."

"Thanks to you, yes," said the good-natured fellow, taking the other's outstretched hand, but quickly releasing it to remove his hat.

"Let me take it," said Phelps quietly, "and your cloak."

He took hold of the lapel as he spoke; the new-comer turned quickly and left the garment in his hand. The movement had that easy, unexpected grace which only the unfortunate acquire.

"Some improvement on yesterday," he added, as he seated himself beside the open grate.

"Real Washington weather," answered Phelps carelessly.

"Yes," said the other, with a shrug, "seven months April and five months August."

"Is that the best you can say of our climate?"

"Isn't it good enough? It seems to me a curiously unfortunate location for the capital,—between the North and South, socially, politically, and climatically. After all, as an old neighbor used to say, 'It's a right good place to be alive in.'"

"Just so," said the elder man, with an uplifting of the eyebrows to show his appreciation of the other's humor. Then, after a moment: "Well, did you get service on our friend Collins, Major?"

"That I did," answered the one-armed veteran. "Got deputized and did it myself."

"How did he take it?"

"Mad enough at first, but when he had cooled down a bit and looked at the papers, not so unreasonable, after all."

"Did not object to it's being done on a holiday, then?"

"Didn't say anything about it."

"Does he mean to fight?"

"He talked pretty loud, and I told him we didn't expect anything else; that to my mind a fight was all the fun there was in a lawsuit, and all the money there is in one for a lawyer. This seemed to strike him as a new idea, though it is the oldest kind of a notion to me; and he asked me to sit down while he read the papers carefully. He isn't half a bad fellow, though the moss has grown on his back so thick that one has to sink a shaft through it, to get at him."

"I understand," said Phelps, with an appreciative nod.

"Well, I sat down, and he put on his spec-

tacles and went through those papers as solemnly as an owl. He's got plenty of horse-sense, and would be a bad man to fool with if once aroused, though he hasn't rubbed up against the world a great deal lately. He's one of those men who know things without having to study details, and when he got through reading the papers he knew a deal more about the case than your counsel did, though I had not failed to look them over pretty carefully, myself."

"You did not have the key that he possesses," said the other smiling.

"That was evident the very first word he said," laughed the Major.

"What was that?"

"After he'd read the papers all through, he took off his glasses, stroked his beard, looked out of the window, as if he had all of time and a good deal of eternity to do his business in. I wasn't in any hurry either, so I waited. Besides, the man interested me, and I began to think there might be something in him."

"Couldn't be a Collins and not be worth studying."

"So I found out. Well, after a time, he turned to me and asked without any preliminaries; 'What do you know about this man, P. P. Smith?'"

Phelps laughed dryly.

"What did you tell him, Major? I'm curious to know what answer you would make to such a question."

"'Twasn't easy to know what I ought to say, but I concluded to fall back on that last refuge of the unwilling witness—the truth. So I told him 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,' as if I had been on oath."

"And what was that?"

"That I didn't know a blamed thing about the man with the pluperfect name, except what appeared in the papers."

"That *was* a safe answer," said Phelps, laughing heartily.

"It turned out to be the very best one I could have made. The old fellow thawed out and limbered up, and laughed until the tears came, over that answer, as if it was the best joke of the season. Finally, he caught his breath long enough to say that he could see I had not a very large practice. I told him his conclusion was correct, but that his manners were simply execrable. Thereupon he sobered down at once, begged my pardon, and said he only meant that I was too much inclined to truth-telling to get on at the bar. I answered him that it was rather tough to have one's veracity complimented at the expense of his

professional standing. Whereupon the old fellow came quite down; asked me to take 'a nip' with him, and said that as I had been so candid with him, he would be equally frank with me. So, while we absorbed the refreshments he ordered up, he told me as queer a story as I've ever listened to.

"In the first place, he said, there was no use of any litigation, at all, if the man we represent can identify himself as actually the man he claims to be. In that event, he said, there was no doubt that, as executor of his brother, Junius Collins, he would not only have to surrender the plantation, but account for the *mesne* profits. The estate he said was amply good, and as he was the only heir who could interpose an objection, we might rest satisfied that there would be no factious opposition. Then he told me that some few months ago his brother had died, leaving a will in which he bequeathed this property, and a good part of his estate beside, to the widow of this same P. P. Smith, if living, and in case of her death, to a son of said widow, born before her marriage, and directed his executors to expend a certain sum in discovering the said devisees, or either of them. In case proof of the death of both was obtained, the will directed that the property should go to the residuary legatee, which is

the brother himself. Until such proof is secured, his title remains imperfect and contingent merely. That is evidently the cause of his special interest in the health and safety of our P. P. S., who seems to be one of those lucky mortals who live to witness not only the grief of his own widow, but the frantic efforts of the stranger to console her woe."

As the Major proceeded with his recital, his client nodded now and then in confirmation of his statements.

"He said," the other continued, "that he did not suppose a man of your character and position would yourself become a party to such an action, unless you were able to show very clearly the identity of the person through whom you claimed with the former,—or perhaps he ought to say, the real owner of the property. As to his brother's title, he did not hesitate to say that it was good only against the widow of Smith, and only to the extent of her interest in her husband's estate, if she were really a widow at the time she signed the deed. This, he said, he had already had reason to doubt, and if you could establish that fact, he should make no further contest in the matter."

"I am sure," said Phelps, "that was very reasonable—especially when you consider the man and his relation to the estate."

"Yes," answered the Major, "and his brother's relation to the matter, too."

"Did he tell you that?"

"I think he told me all he knew, keeping nothing back. Anyhow the story was strange enough to be a true one. You know all the wonderful things are facts, nowadays, and only the commonplace ones, fiction. Well, to make what was a long story as he told it, short, because I cannot do it justice in the telling, he says that some time along about the beginning of the war, his brother, who was a Confederate officer by the way, became enamored of a very pretty slave-girl belonging to their mother, who was a widow. His infatuation led him to come home from the army without leave, and he was only saved from being proceeded against as a deserter, by the fact that he was assaulted by the girl's Negro lover, and so badly injured about the head that he was unable to return to duty.

"For a long time he was thoroughly demented and would allow nobody to approach him or care for him except the girl, whom he would hardly permit out of his sight. His brother, the defendant in your action, who had remained at home to look after the plantation, took his place in the army, this fact, together with his mental condition, saving him from con-

dign punishment. Toward the close of the war, his condition seemed to improve, but he never fully recovered his former mental soundness; so his brother thinks at least."

"He showed very good sense in the management of this property," said Phelps, with an incredulous smile.

"That his brother admits," responded the Major, "but he says it's a family failing. 'A Collins,' he says, 'don't need good sense to make money.'"

"Perhaps it is not the very highest quality of mind," said the elder lawyer, with mock gravity.

"It's always been just a peg above my capacity, anyhow," replied the other good naturedly, as he took out a paper of tobacco, laid it on his knee, and with his one hand deftly separated a portion, rolled it between his fingers and deposited it in his mouth.

The elder observed him without seeming to do so, wondering at the skill displayed in the manipulation of the package.

"Well," continued the Major, "he says, at any rate, that his brother never got over his infatuation for the girl, and that made him a fool always afterwards. It seems that soon after the close of the war, the girl ran away with this P. P. Smith, who was an officer in

a colored regiment stationed near where his brother lived, taking with her a child born some two years before. She was a very attractive woman, it seems, and, as Collins says, very reasonably preferred being the wife of a low-down white man, to remaining the mistress even of a Collins, now that freedom had cast the responsibility of self-control upon her. As to the man who married her, he thinks that she passed herself off to him as a widow and white, which he says she might easily have done, as there was no trace of colored blood about her. She was not one of the regular stock of slaves belonging to the family, but had been purchased, nominally as a maid for their sister, but really, as I gathered, to save the brother from having a liaison with a slave belonging to another family.

“After her disappearance, it seems, he did not rest until he had traced her out. It took him several years, and then it was more by accident than skill that he found her and her husband settled on a valuable plantation in South Carolina. Just what occurred, after this, Collins says he has been unable to learn. His brother settled in the neighborhood, and he infers resumed his old relations with the wife. Of this, however, he has no certain evidence. Soon afterwards the husband dis-

appeared—was reported to have been killed. He had been active in politics and had made himself ‘obnoxious,’ as the saying is in that section, to the ‘respectable people’ of the region by the free expression of his opinions. Whether his brother had anything to do with this affair or not he does not know, but candidly states that he deems it very probable that he had.

“After the husband’s disappearance, his brother took up his residence with the widow, ostensibly to protect her from violence. This, his brother believes to have been a mere pretense. Soon afterwards he secured a lease of the plantation from the widow, and not long after she executed to him a deed. He is known to have paid her a considerable sum of money, though nothing like the real value of the property, on which he soon developed some of the richest phosphate beds in the State, from which he derived a large revenue up to the time of his death and which are still very valuable. Soon after the purchase of this property the widow, too, disappeared, taking her eldest child with her. Another child had been born during her marriage, but this one—a girl—had somehow disappeared soon after the killing of her husband. He does not conceal his belief that his brother was privy to the child’s dis-

appearance as well as that of the father. This was, he admits, the general impression in the neighborhood both at the time and since."

"It is a very curious condition of society that permits such things," mused the elder man.

"Curious?" exclaimed the other. "You take it very coolly, because, I suppose, you are more familiar with its aspects than I. For myself, I must confess, my feelings vibrated between rage and wonder during the recital. It did not seem possible that it could be the latter half of the nineteenth century in which these things happened, or an intelligent, well-educated, upright, Christian American, who spoke so lightly and coolly of them. I think I should have pinched myself to see if I was awake, if I had had an extra hand not needed to hold my glass."

"What became of the woman and child?"

"That, he says, is a mystery he is unable to solve as yet. His brother was unable to find them, though he made diligent search for them after some little time had elapsed. At first, it would appear as if he expected her to return of her own accord, or at least give some hint of her whereabouts. After he had given up hope of this, it seemed that the track got too cold to permit of her being traced."

"It must have sounded like a romance to you, Major," said Phelps meditatively.

"Romance!" exclaimed the Major with a shrug. "Say rather an o'er true tale of some dark age brought suddenly into juxtaposition with ours. Especially was this so when he tried to connect the poor fellow with one of the bravest men I ever had in my command,—the color-sergeant of my regiment, who was promoted for gallantry in being the first man to get the flag to the top of Mission Ridge."

"Same name?" asked Phelps carelessly.

"Yes; and the same nickname, too, 'Pepperpod.'"

"Perhaps the same man."

"I declare, I hope not. He was too good a fellow to have so much bad luck."

"Getting killed, you mean?"

"That—and—everything!"

"Do you think you would recognize your old sergeant?"

"I don't know: twenty-five years makes a difference in a man's appearance, especially if he spent a quadrennium in the service."

"Ever seen him since?"

"Never; and hadn't thought of him for years until yesterday in the Best House. By the way, old man Prime seemed to know him—and me too. I meant to have had an-

other talk with him, but I see the old fellow is dead."

"Died last night," said Phelps, as he went to his desk and picked up the package of papers lying on it. Selecting one, he returned and handed his friend a small photograph, evidently a copy from some other style of picture.

"That's the man," said Wolcott as soon as he caught sight of the face.

The elder man nodded.

"Poor fellow!" said the veteran, meditatively, "He deserved better luck."

"He became very rich after he came here."

"I'm glad of that. I was afraid this suit was the only chance he had for any comfort in his old age."

"Well, this estate is quite a plum of itself."

"So it is. By the way, if you can satisfy Collins about the matter without letting him know the whereabouts of your client—or your alienee rather, though I suppose the terms are synonymous—"

The other assented with a nod.

"Well, as I say, if you can keep from putting him in possession of his whereabouts, I think you had better do so. He seems willing enough to give up the property,—knowing he can't hold it,—but somehow, I've a notion that he's got a different sort of an account to settle

with Mr. P. P. Smith if he should ever set eyes on him."

"For what?"

"I hardly know. He intimated that a party of Negroes—at least he supposes they were Negroes, and considering what he admits had already occurred, it would seem natural that they should be, if there is any human nature in the race—at any rate, somebody broke into his brother's house, some few months after he had taken charge of the dead man's affairs, and treated him pretty bad—mutilated him, you know. I think he has a notion that Smith had something to do with it."

"The man is dead," said Phelps gravely.

"Well, I'm glad of it," answered the other with a sigh of relief.

"I declare, Major," laughed Phelps, "you are a contradiction. A little while ago you were pitying the poor fellow's bad luck, and now here you are thanking your stars that he is dead!"

"It does seem queer," answered the Major gravely, "but I was in earnest both times. There's something eerie about the whole matter, and I'm glad there can't be any more of it. When can you see Mr. Collins?"

"At two o'clock, if convenient for him," responded Phelps, consulting his memorandum.

"All right. I know that will be satisfactory. Do you wish me to be present."

"I guess we shall want you—afterwards," was the reply with a meaning smile.

"I understand," said the Major.

Before the other could bring his hat he had taken it from the rack, clapped it on his head, and with a deft movement of body and arm swung his cloak upon his shoulders.

"Good-by," he called as he slipped out, catching the door-knob with his one hand as it closed behind him, and ran briskly down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING DEAD.

AT the hour designated Mr. Phelps sat at his desk, and facing him across the corner of the green baize top was Mr. Ephraim Collins. Tall, narrow, his forehead high and his beard and hair of that dull brown so often met with at the South as to be almost characteristic of that section, he was a good type of its best life. To see him as he sat, neither lounging nor erect, in the large arm-chair, but just accommodating his attitude to the requirements of ease and absolute attention, one readily recognized him as a product of plantation-life not, as it has been so often pictured, clamorous and self-assertive, but reserved, intense, careless of personal surroundings but full of power, capable of long-sustained effort and of unconquerable determination. His small gray eyes were fixed steadily upon the lawyer's face, not with any expression of suspicion but with that intentness which comes from habitual isolation and constant association with inferiors.

"There is no need for us to beat about the bush, Mr. Collins," the lawyer was saying. "I claim the property by demise from P. P. Smith. There is the deed; I think it is in due form."

The other glanced carelessly at the document, laid it down upon the desk, rested his left hand upon it, and looked up at the lawyer without making any reply.

"Here," continued the latter, "is a photograph of my alienor taken several years ago."

Mr. Collins took it, gazed at it intently, and raised his eyes again to the lawyer's, still remaining silent.

"These are photographs of his wife, one of them taken several years ago, the other recently. If you have any doubt in regard to the matter she can be produced."

"I haven't any doubt that she's alive, Mr. Phelps, because you tell me so, and even if you were inclined to do otherwise, a man in your position cannot afford to speak anything but the truth in regard to such a matter. And as it seems she was not a widow when she executed the deed, my brother's claim of title falls. The only question between us now is, what his estate ought to pay for the use of the property. I don't reckon we'll disagree very greatly about that. My brother's books show exactly what he made each year, and I will

submit them to your inspection. I don't suppose the owner really had any right to assign his claim for *mesne* profits, but I make no objection. They might as well be settled in this suit as in another; but I'd like to ask one question."

The gray eyes beamed like fire under the overhanging brows, but not a muscle of his face moved nor did his voice betray any unusual emotion.

"What is that?"

"I want to know where this man, P. P. Smith, is?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"I want to see him—once—just once."

"I think it might be arranged—if you deem it necessary to resolve any doubts as to his identity."

"I don't believe I shall ever be fully satisfied until I have looked him in the face."

"Is it necessary you should see him before our business is concluded?"

"Oh, not at all: I can wait. In fact I'd rather not see him until our matters are all settled."

"I hope you do not seek any personal difficulty with him?"

"My reasons for desiring to make his acquaintance are—satisfactory to myself, sir.

I suppose I am not called upon to say more."

The tone was nonchalant, almost defiant, but low and even, and the man did not move a muscle of face or body as he spoke.

"I only wished to inform you," said the lawyer, "that any such intention, if you have it, must be abandoned."

"May I inquire why?" There was the slightest possible trace of a sneer, as he added, "If you do not care to introduce me, I can find him myself. I am in no hurry, and the world is not very large."

"The man is dead."

"You said I could see him?" incredulously.

"You can," gravely.

The other was silent for a moment. Then he said in a softened voice :

"I am glad of it. I thought I had an account to settle with him, but perhaps, instead of a settlement, it would have been just opening an new one. I don't know as I blame him much, but it was one of those things no man can do to a brother of mine, and live long after I set eyes on him."

"So bad as that?" asked the lawyer, with real concern in his voice.

"Don't ask me, sir ; it is one of those things we cannot speak about. I would still like to

ask one question. If you do not wish to do so, of course you will not answer it. What sort of a man was he?"

"He was a very correct man in his business affairs, and very highly esteemed by all who knew him."

"Very likely. That is not what I mean—exactly. Was he what would be termed a gentleman? You know what I mean."

"I do not think he was," answered Phelps impassively.

"I am glad of that, too," emphatically.

"Yes? May I ask why?"

"Well one pities a gentleman, sometimes when—well, there's a difference, you know."

"If you would care to read it—it might interest you—here is an account of his life written by himself."

The lawyer picked up a red, morocco-covered book marked, "Cash Book" on the back, and broke the leaves over his finger as he spoke.

"I think, if you are willing, I would like to look it over."

"There are some things in it—you understand—some things that might affect the happiness of others,—innocent parties. If you are willing to give me your promise?"

"You have my word of honor, sir; not a

hint of its contents shall pass my lips. It shall be as if I had never seen it."

"You will be less liable to interruption if you sit over there by the window," said Phelps, handing him the book.

Ephraim Collins seated himself as directed, opened the book, and read :

XXIV.

A TRUE RECORD.

“ I WRITE these pages in order that the happiness of those I love may at no time be imperilled by a lack of knowledge of the events of my life. I shall leave the book in my counsel’s hands, with directions to make known its contents to whomsoever he may deem it advisable to impart the secret of my life, and whensoever he believes its perusal may result in any good or the prevention of any evil. I have done little enough of good in my life not to desire to be the unconscious cause of farther beneficence ; and I have done enough of evil to wish to prevent others from doing more, if I may.

“ Accident divided my life into three parts, apparently almost unrelated to each other. In each case, this was done without my volition, though when once effected, I did all in my power to prevent any trace of my former identity from being discovered. Aside from this, mine has hardly been an exceptional ca-

reer save in one thing. During the first period, or until my twenty-first year, my life was in all respects more tolerable than the average of the class to which I belonged. Indeed, it may be doubtful if, among the millions sustaining the same relation, there was a single other who enjoyed like advantages and equal opportunities. I certainly never heard of one so highly favored, and to that fact, no doubt, is traceable much that I have enjoyed, and practically all that I have suffered, since that time.

“So far as I am responsible for the tenor of my life, I have little apology to make for its character. I have not been a good man, as the world measures goodness at least, nor have I always wished to be good. In a few instances, I have wrought evil to my fellows from a set purpose to do them harm; in many more, I have, I fear, done wrong through lack of knowledge or careless disregard of what I might have learned. In some few cases, my conduct has been animated by revenge, but usually a blind, passionate desire for the happiness of those I loved, has been the controlling impulse of my life. As a rule, I can honestly claim to have done the best I was capable of doing under the circumstances. In those cases where it would seem that I might

have done better, the impartial reader will see that antecedent conditions rendered it well-nigh impossible for me to adopt any other course. In addition to that hereditary bias which colors to so great a degree all lives, mine has been shaped by the operation of great natural laws which govern general conditions and are as inflexible as the laws of matter.

“A knowledge of this fact has taught me to believe in God and in the wisdom and justice of His dealings with humanity,—not that I can clearly see them exemplified in my own life, but because I perceive that my life must be judged by its relation to all other lives—past and future—and the wisdom of its Author by the sum of all the relations of all human lives. I cannot apply such a measure. I cannot judge of even one life’s worth or worthlessness. Its good and evil have not fruited, perhaps have hardly seeded, yet. They may touch other lives yet unborn: so that the works by which it must be judged are yet largely unperformed. Only Infinity, therefore, can rightly judge even the commonest human life. Because of this I have long striven to abstain from blaming individuals for acts that seem to me unjust. I simply do not know how much of the fault belongs to them, and how much is attributable to influences for which they are

not responsible. I have ceased to blame the instrument, and learned instead to seek out and hate the force by which it is impelled.

“My life has been the prey of malign influences which warped the conscience and dulled the apprehension of a whole people, making wrong seem right, and evil to appear more tolerable, when done to one man than if done to another. Those who did these things I have forgiven: the forces which prompted or excused their conduct, I can never hate enough. Of the evil which affects individual lives, only a small portion springs from individual inclination,—is what may properly be termed intended wrong. The great bulk of it comes from habitual apathy to individual right, injustice inspired by greed, or ambition, or even the misapprehended teachings of religion—until peoples become crystallized malignities, impelled almost irresistibly to do evil. These tendencies it is permissible to hate: these it is a duty to hate—a duty which each man owes to his fellow who is wronged thereby, and to God whose beneficence is thwarted by their malign potency.

“Of the forces which have thus balefully touched my life, the chief is that monster which has been the source of so many woes,—the idea that God created one human being infe-

rior to another, and destined to be forever subordinate and subservient. It is the cloak and cover of all enormity,—the shield of oppression, and the ready excuse for unutterable infamy. The man who believes in and practices this dogma may be all that is good and pure, or he may be a leper unconscious of his own foulness. The society—the people affected by it, become inevitably degraded. Things done at its behest seem pure in their eyes, which done from any other motive would seem inexpressibly vile. It becomes an excuse for all crime and an unresting impulse toward fresh injustice. A community which has once yielded to its sway can never halt in the path of oppression until it reaches the climax of evil, or some stronger force compels it to turn backward. It drives, with relentless malignity, the patriarchal slavery of the early days on into the leprous foulness, the inexpressible infamy of its closing years. Beginning to act in the same direction, as soon as the restraining force was removed, it is now urging the same peoples who were affected by its power, on toward another gulf of horror equally wide and deep, which yawns before oppressor and oppressed alike. Wisdom cannot be grafted on the stock of slavery: justice cannot be estab-

lished without denunciation and disapproval of the wrong.

“The American people have not yet learned this lesson. It is not certain that they ever will. They desire credit for having eradicated evil; but are unwilling to discountenance the impulse from which it sprung. They abolished slavery, but in the same breath said to those who had drenched a continent in blood in support of its infamies, in effect: ‘Though you shall no longer enslave this race who have been your bondsmen, yet, in consideration of the habit of domination which has become an established part of your nature, we will not give them any efficient safeguard against violence or rapacity, and whatsoever other evil, short of legalized bondage, you may see fit to impose on them, that you are at liberty to perpetrate. We will not listen to their cries; we will not defend their rights; we will not redress their wrongs!’

“So the stock of slavery,—the underlying principle of the essential inferiority of a race,—being freely watered with the blood of free-men, is sending up new and more vigorous shoots, which are already yielding fruits hardly inferior in acrid horror to those which hung upon the tree which was cut down with such a show of earnest purpose to destroy.

“The other force which is most responsible for the conditions which have affected not only my life, but millions of others, is that religious sentiment which was at once the servant and defender of the other,—the worship of a deity which is said to permit, ordain and decree the essential inferiority of one part of humanity to another, and to sanction and approve the subordination of the interests, rights and privileges of one section of His believers, to the pleasure, greed and prejudice of another—a religion which at one time openly, and at another tacitly, maintains that the right of one class of believers—one type of human beings, is essentially inferior to the privilege of another. It has made the Christ the defender of caste—the tutelary head of a religion which has one measure of right, of privilege and opportunity for a white man or a white woman, and another standard of right and privilege for a colored man or woman. This religion excuses the white man’s license and suppresses the colored man’s complaint. For every wrong done the colored man, it finds some palliation; for the evil he suffers, it urges only patient endurance and offers no hope of remedy this side the grave. It is a religion of injustice and inequality. Its mission is to find excuse for wrong, rather than a remedy for evil. It admin-

isters soporifics rather than purgatives, to the troubled conscience.

“I do not mean by this to assail Christianity. I know little about it except in the abstract, for my own ideas have become so warped that I can hardly imagine a church which has not one door for black and another for white believers, or in which one of the inducements to the colored believer is not that in the kingdom of heaven he shall be accounted white, or at least, as good as a white man. I could not worship such a deity. I would rather suffer eternal torture than accept a God who would measure one man's right by the yard and another's by the barleycorn, or accord to one license to do evil because he is white, and impose on another intolerable wrong because he is black!

“Yet I believe in the Carpenter's Son of Nazareth—the Christ who came to bless and cure—to whom all men are alike, who did not wink at the sins of the rich nor magnify the errors of the weak. His teachings I revere as God's ideal of the relation which should subsist between man and man, both individually and collectively. The ‘white’ Christ is man's distortion of that ideal. Yet I believe the ‘white’ Christ will continue to dominate the Christian thought, and consequently to mould

the public sentiment, of this country—perhaps of the world, for ages, perhaps forever. Thus far, no free colored race has accepted the religion of the white Christ except to insure its own destruction. The Sandwich Islanders embraced it, and were destroyed. In Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, the United States,—everywhere it has been the accompaniment of bondage, or the precursor of destruction, to the colored man. It is a cult that believes in ‘dead Indians,’ and subject Negroes. It sends missionaries to proclaim salvation to the heathen, but never thinks of offering justice to him while he remains on earth.

“These two forces have made my life what it has been. I do not mean to complain. Perhaps, when the Divine test is applied, it will be found that the general welfare of humanity demanded that I should know and feel these very things,—that my life has been as easy and as sweet as Divine justice could make it, consistently with the tenor of the lives that went before it, and the good of those that are to come after it.

“I have, no doubt, often misconceived my duty, and may have wholly failed to correctly interpret my environment or to comprehend the duties and obligations it imposed: I shall relate the story of my life, not to excuse or justify myself. Whether I have acted rightly

or wrongly, will be of little consequence to any who may read this record. A knowledge of the influences that inclined me to do well or ill, may possibly help some other soul to avoid my errors and improve upon my successes. I desire to bind no one to my conclusions, but leave each to draw what lesson he may from the story of a life remarkable only for its difficulties and disappointments,—to determine whether I rightly or wrongly interpreted that riddle of Yesterday which To-morrow forever guesses better than To-day.

“MY FIRST.”

“At my birth I was named Pac—nothing more. I was not christened : the law did not permit it. In truth, there was no need ; god-parents were an absurdity to one having a master. When one day old, I was regarded as of the value of one hundred dollars in current funds. From this, I infer that I was a healthy and well-developed infant. I was the fifth child of my mother, who was yet a young woman when I was born. She had no husband ; the law forbade the marriage of such as she. She was a comely woman, which was no doubt the reason she found favor in my master’s eyes. I do not remember that there was any trace of African blood in her appearance. Her children all had a striking resemblance—to my master. She herself had also a strong resemblance to the females of my master’s family. She was a very capable woman and tender-hearted. She sometimes feared her children might be taken from her, but our master soothed her with promises. That she was a profitable servant is apparent from the fact

that, 'Eudice, aged thirty, with seven children,' was entered as, 'Lot No. 10,' on the administrator's schedule after my father died, and assessed, for the purpose of distribution among the heirs,—the Collinses did not sell slaves, though they sometimes bought them,—at the sum of \$5400—a very moderate price, as I have been assured by those familiar with the market rates, at that time. She was described as having "very light hair and eyes, medium size, healthy, still in her prime—a choice lot.

"I was then six years old. As I remember her, my mother fully justified this description, which I happened to find attached to the Administrator's Returns among the records of the County Court many years afterwards. I think she was as good as—as most women would have been with her environment. She loved my father, and he was undoubtedly fond of her. The latter fact was of advantage in ameliorating the conditions of her life. Otherwise, it was of little moment. If it had not been McQueen Collins, it would have been some other man of the same class. Such women as my mother had no other prospect before them. That she was entirely satisfied with her condition is hardly probable; that she was greatly disturbed by it, I think altogether improbable.

She held the highest rank one of her class could aspire to; and was greatly esteemed by the whole of my master's family, some of whose white children she had nursed along with her own.

"My father was a man highly esteemed by all who knew him, and not without public distinction. His family was an old and honorable one. They owned great estates, and had always been successful in business affairs. He was a member of Congress, and I have heard that I was born here in Washington. He was of strict religious habits; and upon the whole a very good man, and I have reason to believe, an excellent master. My mother mourned very deeply at his death, partly no doubt from sorrow and partly from apprehension as to her own future and the fate of her children. In the settlement of the estate, she fell to one of the daughters, and was taken to another State. I have heard that her new master was very kind to her. She had several children to take the place of those she lost. Those born during my master's life were scattered here and there among the heirs. I fell to Marse 'Bug,' and remained at the home plantation. I saw most of the others after emancipation, but did not reveal my identity to them. It was useless to do so: I could not do them any good. I have

helped some of their children—to become white. I hope *their* children will be able to forget their origin. The one fortunate thing about slavery was that it left no family tree to blight with the shade of its dead branches the new shoots.

“Marse ‘Bug,’ was very kind to me. He was younger by three years, and I had been his ‘boy’ ever since he was born. He was an easy, good-natured fellow, who liked a good time better than his books. His mother had me taught the same lessons in order to stimulate him. I did not like the tasks any better than he. Being so nearly of an age, we grew up very much like brothers. There was, indeed, so striking a resemblance between us that the most casual observer could not fail to notice it, and we were sometimes mistaken for each other. As we grew older, I still shared his lessons and his sports,—not unfrequently his dissipations, also.

“Of course the difference in our positions galled me some, but I do not think I minded it much until I fell in love. I had the thrifty habit of the family, and had already accumulated quite a little stock of coin, which I had hidden in a safe place,—not with any idea of ever having a use for it, but from the mere instinct of acquiring and hiding. Just before the war, I became acquainted—I may as well

say, infatuated—with a girl living on a neighboring plantation. Her name was Mazy,—that's what they called her, at least. Her mother had belonged to the Mays in her young days, which was probably the reason for the name. Slavery made some queer derivatives. Marse 'Bug' was christened Junius; but Junius became 'June-bug,' in the 'quarters,' and finally mere 'Bug,' for convenience. Of course, it was not long before Marse Bug knew about my love affair. We were just back from college, where I not only waited on him, but had studied his lessons with him too, when the whim seized him to have me do so; as it very often did. He had a notion that it helped him to master his tasks if he required me to memorize them first and then repeat them to him by rote. I had a sort of pride in it, too, though I took no real interest in study. Why should I? Of what value was knowledge to the slave?

"I was fond of reading, however, and read everything I could lay my hands on. It was against the law to teach a slave, but Marse Bug was very proud of his 'educated nigger,' as he called me, much as if I had been a trick dog or a 'learned pig.' When he first began to study Latin, he had named—or rather nicknamed—me, Pactolus. Perhaps that was what the

original 'Pac,' was intended for. One night some of his cronies at the University were having a carouse, and I was called upon to show off my acquirements. One of them, swearing I was the first 'nigger' student who had ever been at the institution, proposed that I be dubbed Pactolus, *Prime*, and required to celebrate the event by drinking an immense bowl of punch, and performing sundry other antics for their entertainment. They set out to celebrate my 'matriculation,' as they termed it, by a roaring debauch, in which I was made to share for their amusement. I may as well confess that I did so not at all unwillingly.

"The programme was carried out to the letter, and I was rolled under the bed drunk by our drunken guests, and my master put in the bed also drunk. So they thought at least. In the morning I found myself in the bed, and Marse Bug under it. The matter got out, and he was sent home in disgrace for the rest of the year. We never returned. It was during this period of rustication that I met my Mazy.

"I went to see my sweetheart at every opportunity; but I was startled enough when I learned that 'Miss Mary'—that was Marse Bug's mother—had bought her in order, so he told me, that I 'needn't have to be away from home so much.' From that time I was jealous

of my master. Then the war came on and he went into the service. I went with him. He was not often at home, and always left me in the camp when he went.

“One day along in the second year of the war, he told me to take his things down into the city, near which we were in camp. When I did so, he went to the station, and told me he had got leave to stay in town for a week, but was going home, instead. I was to remain in the city until his return. Instead of obeying, I took the next train and followed him. I had no difficulty about getting a pass, having forged a letter to the Commander of the Post, from Marse Bug, asking leave for his servant to go home and bring on some ‘supplies.’ I was hardly six hours behind my master. It was night when I arrived. The house was brilliantly illuminated in honor of his return. I approached through the garden, passing under a long arbor. It was the place where I had been accustomed to meet my sweetheart, and my mind was full of her as I stood in the flower-scented shadow of the vine. Passing through I saw, in the moonlight at the end, the subject of my thought,—in my master’s arms! To wrench off a piece of the railing and deal him a blow that came near being fatal, was the work of an instant. I supposed him

dead, and have always regretted that the stroke was not mortal. I suppose God knows why he was permitted to live ; I do not. The girl fled without a word. I took a horse from the stables ; dug up my little store of money, and three days after was in the Federal lines.

“Thus ended the first chapter of the story of my life. Henceforth, I was to be not myself, but another.

“MY SECOND.”

“My second life began when the first ended. I was mistaken for a white man by the picket which captured and marched me into the Federal camp. It was not strange that they should err in this respect: I was fairly well-dressed, and the regiment whose lines I entered was made up of Northern men, who were unfamiliar with the peculiar earmarks of bondage. Very naturally, I had not so many of these distinguishing features as some of my fellows. I was suspected of being a spy, and was taken before the Colonel. He was a man of middle age; a lawyer, keen, observant, and not so trammelled with regard for orders and regulations as if his life had been purely military. I invented a story to comport with the mistake my captors had made, and this was repeated by the sergeant who took me to the commanding officer. I had assumed the rôle of a Union man fleeing from the Confederate conscription. It was a common enough experience, and I had no idea I would be tripped in the story I meant to tell. The Colonel

scanned me closely, and then began to ask questions. After a time we were left alone.

“‘Pac,’ said the Colonel, in a sharp, low tone,

“I sprang to my feet in an instant,—I had been sitting on a camp-stool—and before I knew it, had dropped my hat and answered, ‘Sah!’

“‘I thought so,’ said the Colonel with a smile. ‘Sit down.’

“He then showed me a newspaper one of his scouts had brought in, which gave a full account of my assault upon my master. He questioned me about it.

“I told him the whole truth. He closed the tent-flap, and informed the sentry that he was not to be disturbed for a little while.

“‘I am required,’ he said, ‘by general orders not to harbor runaways. To put you outside of my lines would be to return a man to slavery who is as white as I am; and also to condemn you to death for an act which all civilized codes justify. By God! I will not do it!’

“He walked across the tent once or twice and then continued:

“‘Of course, you cannot stay here as a Negro. You have come in as a white man, why not remain one?’

“To this proposition I made no objection.

“‘See here,’ said he after a moment’s thought: ‘Why not enlist and become one of my scouts? You know this region and ought to be of service to us.’

“I told him then about a lot of Confederate stores I had seen but slightly guarded at a neighboring railway station, on my way home.

“‘That’s just the thing,’ said he. ‘You can enlist; I will give out that you have brought valuable information, and we will move from here to-morrow.’

“Twenty minutes afterwards I had donned the uniform of a Federal soldier. Thereafter, for half a dozen years, I was to be known only as P. P. Smith. We marched at daylight: my information proved correct, and the movement added another to the well-earned feathers in the cap of our Colonel. He was breveted a Brigadier; I was appointed a Sergeant. A year afterwards, I was promoted to a Lieutenancy in a colored regiment on his recommendation. A short time after this, he was killed in battle. I was then the only one who knew the secret of my first life.

“After the close of the war, my regiment was ordered on duty near my old home. No one recognized me. A uniform and shoulder-straps made an impenetrable disguise, especially

as the slave-boy's face had been bare, and the lieutenant's was bearded.

"My infatuation revived at sight of my former sweetheart. She had a child, now. I made myself known to her,—with no honorable intentions, I will admit. The story she told melted my heart. She had been deceived by my master, who sent her to the arbor to meet me, and had caught her in his arms before she knew who it was. So she said, at least ; I do not know whether she spoke truly, or not : and it is of no consequence now. That she afterwards yielded to his desires, was hardly to be counted to her discredit : the law did not excuse disobedience nor justify resistance. She bore marks of the lash that seemed to attest her faithfulness. It is a short story : I supplied her with funds : she came North, when my regiment was mustered out, and we were married.

"I bought a plantation in South Carolina and removed there. I prospered, as a Collins always does. Saying nothing about our racial affinities, we were accepted as white. Why should we not have been ? An expert could not have detected a trace of color in either ; though he might have found traces of servile condition, no doubt, in both. One who has been a slave can never be made wholly free.

Liberty is a growth—an evolution—not an instantaneous fact.

“ I tried to do my duty as a citizen, and took an active part in the political events of the time ; but my plantation, my business, was my delight. Both my politics and my prosperity, however, made me enemies. Returning from the city one night, I was shot and left for dead upon the highway. A woman found me—one of those curious types of the colored race, in which it seems as if something of the savage still exists, and impels them to live alone. Tall, straight as an arrow, the brown of her cheek had been changed to bronze by race admixture. Her name was Martha: if she had any other, I never knew it. Her hair was long and snow-white, though she could hardly have been more than thirty. She would never talk about herself, and grew moody and savage if questioned. Some uncontrollable frenzy had sent her to the swamps when hardly grown. The war was in progress then : between the lines of the two armies she was safe, but always on the alert for danger. It was not difficult to live under the circumstances ; but the life was that of a savage. After peace came, she built a hut on the edge of the swamp. She worked sometimes, but not regularly. The colored people regarded her with fear, as a conjurer ; the whites

with suspicion, as a pilferer. She took me to her hut and brought a physician. It was a long while before I recovered : when I did it was to find myself a cripple. Worse than that, my hair had fallen out, and my skin had become—what it is now. The doctor said it was the effect of the remedies he had used.

“I hardly cared : perhaps I was even glad to be thus disguised. When I asked about my family, both the doctor and the woman maintained a discreet silence. Finally, I was well enough to return to my home. Arriving at the gate, I saw my sometime master sitting on the porch. He ordered me off the lot, and would have set the dogs upon me but they refused to obey him. My wife stood looking on. My little daughter clambered down the steps and came wonderingly up to me. As I stood there fondling her cheek, I determined on my plan. I returned to the hut and took the woman into my confidence, Fortunately, I had a considerable sum of money about me when I was shot. I had wondered why it had not been taken. As soon as I saw my old master, I knew who had been my assailant, and why. I did not question my wife’s guilt, and cannot understand why I did not kill them both. Instead of that, I stole my child from her room, and left my knife sticking in the

head-board of the bed. If she had awakened, I should have driven it to her heart.

"The woman took the child to the city, where she had already rented a lodging. I went to her old haunt in the swamp. There was not much search for the child—at least, I did not hear of much. When I went back to my plantation again, my old master was living alone in a new house he had built in the yard. I thought I knew the reason of the change. Perhaps I was wrong. I never saw him afterward.

"I returned to the city, and remained for a time with the woman who had nursed me. She was very fond of me, and as faithful as a hound, but could not bear restraint. She wanted to go back to the swamps. I think she resented my misfortune even more bitterly than I. I concluded to give up the struggle to be white and respectable, return with her and take on the rôle of a lame, vagabond 'nigger,' for the rest of my life. On mentioning my design to her, I was surprised to meet objection. She said I must take the child and go away. She had all along been apprehensive in regard to my safety. She refused to accompany me, preferring to look out for herself. I think she felt a sense of inferiority, that made my presence irksome. I divided the money I had left with her, and came on to Washington with my child. I have

never heard of her since. She was a true friend: I mean to go back and find her, if the plan I have in mind succeeds. Somehow, I do not feel that I have treated her exactly right. I am sure she has watched and waited for me, and I should like to see her once more. Who knows but I may yet end my life as a crippled nigger?

“MY THIRD.”

“With my arrival in Washington, commences the third period of my life. I began work as a boot-black, calling myself Prime, and afterward Pactolus Prime, my old slave nickname. When I got a little ahead and wanted to do business, I used the name P. P. Smith, whose agent I professed to be. I have so carefully kept the secret of my identity, that I think no one but my counsel suspects that the well-known dealer in real estate is none other than the boot-black of the Best House.

“I fully intended to return some time and kill the man who had robbed me of so much, and I do not know why I did not, unless it was that my love for my daughter prevented. I did not want to leave her alone. It disarmed me curiously, too, when I thought of my wife. I do not think I hated her as one would suppose. Her falsehood overwhelmed me. I did not know the extent of her guilt. I did not wish to know it. I hoped always that she might not have yielded until she thought me dead—that she might not have yielded at all.

“It was foolish no doubt, but while I waited and tried to think what I would do—what form my vengeance should take,—somehow I lost the desire. I became interested in little business ventures, growing constantly larger and almost always successful. I bought the neglected place I had rented. It was almost hidden by weeds. I gave up the front-yard to them and encouraged them to grow. Sorel and briars and mulleins and burdocks and thistles,—it did me good to see them usurp the whole premises—all but a little path at one side next the thick, thorny osage-orange hedge. I was told that a crazy poet owned it once, and liked the weeds to swarm about his den. It suited my mood too, and as there was no change, the neighbors troubled themselves little about the black crippled misanthrope who occupied it.

“But within I had my jewel, the daughter,—my old master’s daughter, I told every one,—whose face grew fairer and dearer until I hardly thought of anything else on earth. All I did or ventured was for her. I furnished the interior of the old stone house over which the woodbine clambered and around which the weeds flourished, until those who pitied me would have wondered had they known how bright it was within.

“Those were happy days—by far the hap-

piest of my life. All the love I had given to the mother, I gave now to the daughter, and more. Because I loved her so, I forgave the mother,—tried to think of her as dead, and blessed her for this fair flower. It was very foolish, but one shut off from other men's lives and hopes,—doubly branded—must have his own life. I had mine.

"We lived alone. The years went by so swiftly that I hardly noted them—so sweetly that I have never numbered them. It was one long bright day. I was her 'Uncle Pac,'—the one being she knew and loved. I had enough; so we lacked for nothing. Every evening I spent with her: and everything I touched prospered. I almost forgot that I had ever been anything else, and wondered often what those who pitied my condition would have thought, if they had really known what it was.

"But the sweet dream could not last forever. I awoke from it to find that the child was growing up to womanhood, and the followers of the white Christ were seeking to take her from me. What had such an old 'nigger' to do with so fair a flower? People began to talk solicitously about her; very shamefully about me. Her teachers were especially interested in her. They did not exactly propose to take her from me, but I knew what was coming,—separation or

shame. I must decide between shame for her, and sorrow for myself. I could not hesitate,—but took her to the good Sisters,—as far away as I could from myself and my surroundings. She knew nothing of my business or my occupation. To her I have been only her father's old servant.

“Hardly had she gone, when I began to plan for her return. When I found Benny was in the city, I was for a time in fear that my wife would find out my secret, and profane it with the claim of sharing my success and my love. I asked no questions, fearing to risk even my unnatural mask. It was not so much from dislike or distrust of her, as from jealousy; I did not want to share my child—her love, her happiness, with the mother.

“My wife,—I did not love her any more. Come to look back upon it, I doubt if I ever have loved her since I saw her in my master's embrace. But she was fair and I was ambitious. I wanted to make her rich—to gratify all her desires, and have her thank me for all she enjoyed. Now, my ambition had taken a new direction. I wanted to see my daughter rich, accomplished, and without suspicion of her true lineage. To my mind the mother was the daughter's enemy. I took Benny into my employ, simply that I might keep track of this enemy.

“I have succeeded. My child will soon return: she will live in her own house. I will go back to my weed-hidden snugery. Benny will go away,—I will make it an object for him to do so; or better yet, he shall have my business, and *I* will go away. He foolishly insists on being a Negro. Perhaps it is best. His father deserves to be crucified in him. But his children? I do not think I am as nearly white-souled as I once was. Perhaps with the dark integument, I have received some of the nature of the dark race. At least, I cannot bear to think of a father condemning his children to debasement. Of course, if I were really white, I should not mind it—perhaps would count it praiseworthy in a man, to put an impassable abyss between himself and the children of his shame! But as it is, I shudder at the thought that a man should beget souls, whom he knows must transmit the curse of inferiority,—the ever-present thought of injustice and debasement,—to unnumbered generations, transforming the bequest of love into an inheritance of reproach and hate. I shall disappear when I have seen *her*,—I hardly dare call her my child now, even in these pages—fairly started in life. Perhaps I may induce Benny to abandon his Quixotic notions and look out for the happiness of himself and his own. These things

would make a good ending of a life that has been vainly devoted to obliterating the curse that rested on it. I would be willing to suffer more than I have, to see these purposes even half-accomplished. There is no reason why I should not succeed, but somehow I am afraid of failure.

My blue-eyed, fair-haired daughter does not imagine that I am her father. I have cared for her only as the servant of her dead parent. God! How hard it has been! Especially in these later years when I saw her blossoming into beautiful womanhood! But that way only lies salvation for her. Once known to be my daughter,—or even suspected of relationship with me—and all the influences of Christian civilization will be arrayed to drive her back into the abyss of shame from which I have struggled to save her—her and her children, who I trust may yet rise up and call her blessed!

“The white Christ does not permit even the fairest and purest to enter that most exclusive of civilized castes,—the rank of his favored disciples,—if a hint of color can be found in their lineage. It is true that Negro worshipers are permitted at His altars, but it is on sufferance, merely. They must not approach too nearly the white believers, even in

prayer. Its law is inflexible: the white man may touch the colored race without shame, only to do it wrong. Sins which would be mortal, if done against a white man, are but venial if perpetrated against the Negro. As for the colored woman,—this is the openly declared edict of Christian civilization, which no man dare deny ‘One drop of Negro blood known to exist in the veins of a woman draws her down to the social status of the Negro, and impresses upon her whole life the stamp of the fateful Negro caste, though she may rival the Easter lily in the whiteness of her skin, and the purity of her soul.’

“So I have kept my Easter lily white. Her friends are white; and her faith?—I do not know about that. I could not bring myself to have her taught that form of Christian faith which has been so fateful to all colored peoples. While I wished her to be white, I could not bear that she should be taught to despise the race with which she is even remotely allied. She has been educated by the Good Sisters; but they were instructed that no effort to proselyte her would be tolerated. I have seen her only twice since she went away. I trust she still believes in Christ,—whether she believes in Christianity or not, is of little moment. The followers of the white Christ are tolerant

of unbelief. The most notorious mocker that ever lived, if he be but white, is accounted better than the saintliest black who ever sought Divine mercy for those who sinned against him. My hope is that the child has never suspected her own origin, and if that be the case, it is my explicit request that she may never know it.

“Should she have such suspicion, however, and manifest any inclination to identify herself in whatever manner, and for whatever purpose, with that most unfortunate people, I desire that she shall first read this account of my life, and determine for herself what is the duty she owes to herself and her posterity. I do not wish to impose conditions upon her, but I hope she may not decide hastily.

“There is not much more to tell. I would be glad to have her take the name which I made honorable as a soldier, both because of that fact, and because it would take her farther away from the suspicion it is of all things needful for her to avoid.”

XXV.

"BLOOD WILL TELL."

WHEN Mr. Ephraim Collins had finished the perusal of this record, he sat a long while looking out upon the crowds who were passing to and fro on the other side of the Avenue. Yet he did not seem to be noticing them. On the contrary, as he held the red-covered book tightly clasped in his hand, he seemed to behold faces no longer visible—to be living over a momentous past, or perhaps speculating in regard to a still more momentous future. It may be that he was only trying to solve that ever-recurring problem of human life: How will Yesterday's conditions affect To-morrow's tendencies and the world's destiny?

After a time, he crossed the room and laid the book upon the lawyer's desk. His face was very grave, and his voice earnest and subdued, as he said:

"I am sorry I didn't see him,—to know him, that is. He had a hard time, certainly, without

being very much to blame himself, as it seems to me. What he says is all true so far as I know. As for the blow my brother received, though I don't think he ever got over it, I must say I don't blame Pac. As to what happened afterwards, I never knew it until after he was dead. The doctor told me,—the same one who attended Pac when he was shot. He told me about that, too, the shooting I mean, not the transformation—and I naturally put the two things together. I suppose the doctor thought I would never know the man again, even if I found him, as proved to be the case. It's well I didn't, too ; but now I've read what he has written I think it must have been the woman's doings—Martha's, I mean. They're queer, sometimes, those nigger-women ; get desperate, you know, and are as unaccountable as—as if they were white. It's more like a woman—such a revenge—and then her staying with brother Jun afterwards.

"You wonder what I'm talking about? I told you my brother had suffered an injury. It must have been about the time he bought the place of the widow—as everybody supposed she was, at least—somebody broke in on brother Bug one night, tied him up and abused him, shamefully. He wasn't ever the same man afterwards. The widow, she ran away—afraid

of her life as I take it, though perhaps she'd no reason to be—and this woman, Martha, came and took care of him. She always lived with him afterwards, and is on the place managing it now. The doctor says the truth never got out, and I expect that this woman was at the bottom of the whole matter,—doing it to revenge Pac's injury, you see. However that may be, brother Bug came to feel mighty kindly toward her, before he died, and left her enough to make her well off. She said she didn't want it, though; she'd promised him to stay on the plantation until them that was entitled to it came to take possession; then she was going back to the Swamp."

"She will not be disturbed," said the lawyer.

"I doubt if she stays when she learns the man is dead," added Collins. "She's a good manager, though," he continued thriftily.

"I suppose he made a good deal of money here?" he inquired after a moment. "Pac, I mean."

"He was very well off," answered the lawyer cautiously.

"So I hear: I'm glad of it, too,—glad of it. As he says, it's in the blood to get along. He couldn't have been a Collins and missed the chances he's had here. What's the daughter like?"

The lawyer opened a drawer of his desk, and took from it a photograph, which he handed to the other, who scanned it closely.

"Favors her mother, don't she?" he said. "One can see she's a Collins, though," he added with a touch of pride in his tone. "Got any amount of sense, I'll guarantee."

The lawyer smiled.

"Has she any idea of—of—the truth?"

"Not a doubt of it."

"What'll she do?"

"What *can* she do?"

"Why, she's rich, educated, handsome."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody would know," suggested Collins earnestly.

"*She* would know."

"You don't mean that she will throw away all the chances her father worked so hard to give her, and become a—nigger!"

A look of supreme disgust passed over the speaker's face as he uttered these words, showing how sincere was his estimate of the degradation attaching to such a course.

"I do not know what she will do," said the lawyer, wrinkling his brow and biting the side of his mustache. "I do not suppose she herself has any idea yet: but one thing I feel sure about: she will never sail under false colors,

and she will never submit to be regarded as an inferior."

"But her father's wish," urged the other.

"She is much more likely to heed his example than his words. He struggled all his life to win equality of opportunity and esteem. He concluded that such struggle was hopeless: that color-caste has become a part of Christianity, or at least of Protestant Christianity, and that it is useless to combat it. He advises dissimulation, therefore, as the only means by which his daughter and her posterity may obtain the paltry privilege of standing on a level with thousands who are in every respect her inferiors. This involves, of course, a denial of her paternity. Such denial she will never make, nor allow to be made by any implication, on her behalf. She may leave the country,—defy public sentiment—or do anything else, except deny her relationship to a father whom she worships as a hero."

"I don't blame her," said Collins meditatively; "but it—it don't seem necessary. If the country was all Southern, it would be different—but the people of the North,—"

"You're wanted at the telephone, sir," said a clerk entering from another room. "Dr. Holbrook, I think," he added.

"Excuse me," said the lawyer rising.

When he returned a few minutes afterwards, the conversation was not resumed. The details of settlement and adjustment were left to be determined between Collins and the Major.

XXVI.

THE LAW OF PROGRESS.

IT was only a few minutes after Ephraim Collins left, that Dr. Holbrook entered the office.

"How do you do, Doctor?" said Phelps cordially, as he extended his hand for the wraps which the other, with professional carefulness, was proceeding unbidden to remove. "I hope you are none the worse for last night's exposure?"

"Oh, that is nothing," answered the physician. "Of course, I do not go out at night professionally, as a rule—not after ten o'clock, that is. It is a matter of self-defense when one comes to my time of life. Besides that, it is only fair to the young fellows. It is no easy matter to start a practice in a great city, and if those who have attained rank in the profession did not give the youngsters a chance, there would be no way for them to get on at all, until somebody died. I can remember when I thought it the

very acme of good fortune that an eminent physician should send his night-cases to me."

"So you are doing a like favor for another?"

"Certainly; it is the common tariff of goodwill, which every one must pay who would be esteemed worthy of a place in the great republic of science. Only a hog climbs up the ladder of success and remains indifferent to those upon the rungs below him."

"I am afraid few practice such liberal philosophy," said the lawyer smiling.

"More than you think, sir,—more than you think," answered the physician enthusiastically. "Men do more good than we give them credit for, anyhow—do it almost unconsciously. It is only when they become possessed with an idea that they are exceptionally good or wise or capable, that they become thoroughly selfish. Individuals, classes or peoples who are possessed with an idea of their own inherent superiority are always deaf to any consideration of justice to another. Their wish, inclination, pleasure, over-rides another's right, and makes injustice seem a natural and proper thing for them to do. These are swinish ethics, whether manifested in the life of the individual or society. There is much less of it than one would suppose, individually, but collectively it gets to

be a fashion in every state of society in which the attention of individuals becomes, as it were, introverted, fastened upon their own luxuries and enjoyment, instead of being fixed upon new duties and fresh achievements. Progress is always liberal."

"One would think, Doctor, that you supposed all physical analogies to hold good in the moral and social world."

"I told you last night how hard it is for me to let go of a line of thought on which I have once started. I may take a rest upon it for years, but when something calls it up again, off I go as fresh as a hound who strikes a trail after having lost it. Our experience last night started me on one of these trails, and I thought I would come around and tell you of it while it is fresh in my mind. I don't suppose I shall ever elaborate it any further, but I really think it has in it the kernel of a great philosophy. I do not know that the proposition is a universal one, but its illustrations are frequent enough to show that it is not limited to the physical world at least. The idea is this, that the penalty of evil-doing partakes, generally, if not always, of the nature of the sin itself. That this is a divine law appertaining to nations and peoples as well as to individuals.

"Of course, in the physical world, it has

hourly exemplifications. Disease is, in most cases, the result of the physical sin of the individual or of those responsible for his tendencies. A man abuses the organs of his body, and is punished by their rebellion. That is all there is of it. The sin may be through ignorance, accident, or sheer neglect. No matter, it is all sin—a violation of physical law—and the penalty follows. A man overloads his stomach and is punished by its qualms; he overtaxes his nerves and his hand becomes unsteady, his eye refuses to do his bidding, or his brain plays him false in its deductions. In every case, the penalty partakes of the very character of the crime.”

“But suppose it is an inherited or epidemic disease?”

“Then you merely separate cause and effect and make it harder to ascertain the fact of similarity. Somebody has sinned blindly or willfully against physical health, and that sin has produced either a heritable tendency or an avenging spore, which carries the very type of its cause into other lands, or sends it down to scourge the descendants of the offender.”

“That seems clear enough, so far as heritable disease is concerned.”

“But hardly accounts for contagion, you

think? Very probably not, and yet there are a good many things that point that way. Of course, we know the origin of but few such diseases, yet what we do know about them is consistent with this theory. There is cholera, for instance. Universal tradition points to its origin among the weak, half-starved, thirst-parched pilgrims of the eastern world. How suggestive of the prostration resulting from these combined causes, is that sudden collapse which is the special symptom of this disease! The spore reproduces, you see, with deadly certainty the very types of human suffering which resulted from the primal violation of physical law,—the causative sin. It is merely a multiplied avenger whose function is to destroy so many that such violations of natural law shall be prevented—cured, remedied, don't you see? It is the lash of fear applied to human consciousness. There are other diseases which even more clearly illustrate this, and some, I must admit, of the origin of which we know too little to make any reliable deduction in regard to them."

"But how do you get across the dividing line and apply your principle to evil which is not of a physical character, or which is general in its application to nations or races? I confess I do not see."

"Yet you frequently act on the idea, that it does," said the physician. "You admit the principle that violence begets violence: that every act of larceny increases the number of those inclined to steal; that reckless greed of gain stimulates fraud; and the making wealth the sole measure of merit comes, at length, to curse the perpetrators in their strength. Look at the robber-nation which discovered the New World. More than half of it became subject to her sway. The very spirit of pillage which was implanted in the breasts of her people has wrought her own destruction. England's greed for individual wealth has given her a horde of dependent paupers whose lust for possession is beginning to threaten, not merely her peace, but the overthrow of the very system by which her boasted wealth was acquired. If history teaches anything, it is, to my mind at least, that the nation which perpetrates wrong upon another nation or people, simply plaits the scourge that shall some time be laid upon its own back."

"Figuratively, you mean, of course."

"Literally. I mean that there is that mystical quality attached to the very act of wrongdoing that sets in motion the causes which produce retributory consequences of similar character. Sometimes they are physical,

sometimes they are moral, sometimes economical."

"Then you would make the innocent suffer as well as the guilty?"

"There is no question of guilt or innocence in it, because it does not depend in the least degree upon intent. A law is violated: the penalty must be paid: that is all there is of it. Whether it is the doer of evil; those who profit by his acts; those who are sureties for his good behavior, or those on whom the heritage of his evil descends, it matters not. The penalty must be paid, and as the wrong is, such in type must be the expiation.

"Yes, the innocent suffer with the guilty. That is the way God applies the lash to humanity so as to secure amendment. You remember how the typhus swept over the city a few years ago when the great sewer burst. It was a crime. The laws of nature had been violated: dishonest work done: insufficient safeguards provided. We have hardly ceased to pay the penalty yet. Every now and then, the spores then scattered, spring into new life and we bury another victim. Good and bad, innocent and guilty alike suffered. The Divine scourged and terrified. We made haste to apply the remedy—no, not the remedy; there could be none; the time for remedy had passed: the

dead were dead ; the dying doomed. But we provided a safeguard, a preventative of future evil of like character—we made a sufficient and reliable sewer.”

“ Well, Doctor,” said the lawyer gravely, “ no one can accuse you of building on a narrow foundation. You would make every day’s life a lesson taught by the Divine.”

“ And why not ? He whose wisdom framed the laws of life must be a continuing teacher of those that live and have intelligence to ken the lessons He would impart. Not more certainly is it true that ‘ necessity is the mother of invention,’ than that suffering is the seed of progress. You see it in the law. Some man’s smart has been the source of other’s safety in every branch of legislation and jurisprudence. Every flower of political progress has sprung from some kernel of oppression. Wrong is the only subsoil from which legal right has ever come.”

“ I do not know but you are right,” said the other cautiously.

“ In material progress the same is true. Weakness and terror are the only sources of progress. The lightning killed for ages : the philosopher sought a way to restrain it and discovered the mightiest servant of man. The winds are slow and treacherous : we imprison the

mist and mock alike at their violence and their lagging. The sea overflows and destroys; we build a dike. A reservoir gives way and thousands perish: we are taught the use of a wastegate. The agony of millions wrings the heart of man until, groping for relief, we find an anæsthetic. In everything suffering—actual or prospective—is the chief impulse toward amendment. Sometimes it takes the form of cure, sometimes the higher form of prevention. Why should we not trace this law in the molar movements of history as well as in the restricted domain of medicine, law, and material science?"

"Perhaps it might be done."

"Well, I did not come to convert you to my new doctrine nor trap you into dangerous admissions. What I wanted to tell you was a strange illustration of this theory which came into my mind after I left you last night, and kept me awake the greater part of the time until morning. Did you ever trace the origin of the yellow fever?"

"I do not remember to have heard it, though I have an impression that it somehow came from Africa."

"You are just half right: it was generated on the way from Africa. It was born on the coast of America of the African Slave Trade.

It is the child of its horrors. Now, see the application of my theory. The yellow fever appeared first in the slave ports of the New World, two hundred and fifty years ago. It was never heard of in Africa until within the last half-century. This is not strange, for it preys only on the white man or those having a modicum of white blood in their veins.

“What was its cause? Evidently, as says a noted author, ‘the unique unwholesomeness of the life summed up in the phrase, ‘the horrors of the middle passage.’” Among such horrors, nostalgia, despair, the sense of wrong were not the least. To these were added perpetual and overwhelming terror,—fear of future nameless evil. These are the very emotional conditions that have been known, now and then, in the ordinary way of life, to produce that very condition of the visceral organs which is the distinctive ‘note’ of yellow fever,—what we term acute atrophy of the liver.”

“It is very singular.”

“Singular!” echoed the physician, turning fiercely upon his friend, “singular! You speak of one of the most beautiful and terrible acts of Divine justice as you would of the stuffed skin of a two-headed calf in a dime museum! Singular! It is as amazing, sir, as the wisdom which calculated the weight of the planets and

hung them circling in their orbits through the trackless realms of space! The least is not less wonderful than the greatest. It shows Him to be the God of atoms as well as of worlds. Singular! Let us look at its 'singular' features. Yellow fever is a form of typhus; typhus springs from filth. The filth of the slavers was so great that the smell was sometimes detected almost before they were sighted at sea. So said a British officer, whose experience in the matter was very great, in the pages of an official report. Typhus is the penalty of filth, and typhus naturally appeared in the ports where these ships discharged their cargoes. So far there is nothing 'singular' about it, we may say, because humanity has become accustomed to this peculiar penalty for this particular sin.

"Just here comes the 'singular' thing. God stamps this as a peculiar form of typhus by giving it the physical features which had marked the suffering of the slaver's cargo during those terrible days of darkness, storm, heat, terror, and all the untold horrors of that crowning enormity of man to man. Only think of it! Of nine millions that left the African coast more than two millions perished on the passage!

"And God wrought out of their sufferings a

scourge for the oppressor and those allied to him in blood and interest. This is the 'singular feature: the yellow fever did not touch the Negro, and even yet only smites the colored man when the white man's blood is in his veins and he has become a joint heir of the curse attached to the white man's sin."

"This might result from racial differences, might it not?" asked the lawyer.

"Some have sought to weaken the too apparent force of the conclusion I have given, by that hypothesis. Some authors even go so far as to declare that 'the emanations of the Negro are poisonous to the more delicately organized superior white race.' They would have us believe that this disease was not given its characteristic 'note' because of the wrong done to the slave, but because he was a Negro. We are not left in doubt, however, in regard to the truth. Having fashioned the sword for the punishment of a particular evil, God is not slow to apply it to the perpetrators of that wrong; whether the victims are of one race or another. A form of yellow fever, hardly distinguishable from that which tracked the course of the African slaver, sprang up in the ports of Peru and Chili, where it had before been unknown, only a score of years ago, in the wake of the Chinese Coolie-trade—an enormity only a

shade less horrible than the African slave-trade. Mark now the result,—the Coolies were exempt from its scath! Do you think that merely ‘singular’ too?”

The lawyer’s lips were closely shut. Holding one hand between his face and the glowing grate, he was gazing intently at his friend.

“It is very strange,” he said, solemnly.

“Strange? Why should you term it strange? Is it any more strange, than any other great and terrible fact of nature? Is it not about time that the world,—that Christianity, if you please,—began to recognize God as a force in life and history? Have we not sinned and suffered long enough to perceive the great, beautiful, yet terrible truth that the laws of nature are not restricted by visible barriers, but that mind and matter touch each other in cause and consequence,—that an evil done to the soul may be punished through the body and may blast the life of the wrong-doer or those whose lives spring from his life, without harming his victim? Isn’t it about time that we began to realize and to teach that justice is the prime ingredient of political economy.”

“What happened to set you off on this line of thought just now, Doctor?”

“Prime,” answered the physician sharply,

"his family and the anomaly he represents. I wondered what the penalty would be that will assuredly attach to our race for centuries of wrong done to his race. We forbade marriage to millions: will the marriage tie become a mockery with us? We falsified our religion and our laws, in order to make them an excuse and a justification for wrong: shall we suffer in our liberties and our faith? We robbed him of the proceeds of his toil; is it possible that we ourselves may become the victims of an intangible but irresistible translation of power from the hands of the many to the hands of the few?"

The two men sat a few moments, looking at each other in silence.

"Why do you not elaborate your theory, Doctor, and give it to the world in permanent form?"

"I haven't any theory," replied the physician thoughtfully; "I wish I had. It only seems as if I could feel the edge of a truth too great for me to grasp, and which may yet be as familiar to the common mind as the marvels of electricity are to the boy of to-day. It seems to me as if we were just on the verge of the discovery of some universal law of life, by which effects may be forecasted in the moral and political world with the same accuracy as in

the physical. Perhaps I thought you might help me. In our profession we have carried the study of cause and effect far enough so that if you tell me what physical sin a man or a people are committing, I can tell you, in a general way of course, what will be the penalty they will have to pay. Has anybody done the same with collective moral ills?"

"I am afraid not," answered the other.

"Do you suppose anybody believes in such consequences—as I do in the results of the violation of physical laws, I mean?"

"Very few, I should say."

"Do you suppose any considerable number of people believe that the sin a nation commits to-day will surely attach to its people to-morrow, unless it is remedied and its tendency rebutted?"

"I am afraid not."

"I suppose not. Well, it was a good while before our profession began the study of causes rather than effects. It is hardly a century, but in that time we have made more progress, in remedial and preventative knowledge, than in all time before. Perhaps we may yet apply the same system of inquiry to moral evils—social, political and economic. Why should we not?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea if the theory

were true," said the lawyer musingly. "If one could determine the causes of crime and poverty and injustice, it might help to prevent them, if it were no aid in curing them."

"That is it," replied the doctor; "causative knowledge may be of very little value in curing disease, but it is the foundation of all preventive science. Well, I must be going. I don't often have such an attack; you may be thankful for that."

He put on his wraps, and was soon absorbed in considering a case more easily diagnosed than the moral ills of his time.

"That," said the lawyer to himself as the door closed on his friend, "is the way science compels progress—in religion and government, as well as in its own domain. Perhaps he is right. If he is, it simply enlarges the sphere of individual duty and adds to the weight of individual responsibility. So, again, extremes meet and the character of the greatest hinges on the nature of the least—the events of history on the nature of the constituent atoms of epochal life.

"It would seem strange if the climacteric sin of the centuries—American slavery—should have left behind it a mysterious spore which should breed a scourge similar in character to

itself. Yet it is not impossible. After another generation, how many will dare resist the demands of accumulated wealth and corporate power? Even to-day how many must face the alternative: 'Yield or die?' I wish the doctor had not broached his uncanny doctrine. I do not like to think of it."

XXVII.

WHAT IT IS TO BE A HERO.

THE flavor of the Christmas season still hung about the capital when Pactolus Prime was buried. The wealth, the respectability, a good deal of the official aristocracy, and not a little of the beauty and fashion of the city, crowded to the stately church to do him honor. The *Index* had told with flaming headlines, and that skill which so readily weaves fact with fancy, the story of the boot-black of the Best House, who had given a lifetime of labor and self-sacrifice to restore his old master's daughter to ease and luxury. It was a beautiful story, and the lame, dark-visaged Thoth made a peculiarly attractive hero. It was thought very noble for him thus to devote himself to the child of those whom he had served as a slave. A thousand tongues were ready with strange, half-real stories of what he had said and done in those years when the successful speculator was hidden under the guise of the menial. The city was resonant with

acclaim for his faithfulness, self-denial and sagacity.

In all the Christian Metropolis there was not one who did not extol his name as one worthy to be held in especial reverence by his race. He had done, they said, just what a Negro ought to do,—been patient, humble, respectful, and never sought to thrust himself forward or claimed to be the equal of white folks, though he had been so much more successful than many of them. And to give it all to his old master's daughter who had been ruined by the war! How beautiful! How romantic! If there were only more like him among the "niggers," it would not be so hard for white people to get along with them!

It was a touching romance, and the hearts of the Christian Metropolis, already softened by the holy festival, responded nobly to the appeal for recognition of this phenomenal colored man who had so faithfully devoted himself to the happiness of one of the "superior race." Of course, they said, he did nothing more than his duty, but it is so rare to find one of his race willing to recognize any duty to those who kept and cared for them so long, and taught them the blessed truth, "a servant of servants shalt thou be unto thy brethren!" No wonder he loved a master so devoted to his inter-

ests that he actually died to prevent him from being contaminated by the vices of freedom. The heart of the American people melted with compassionate approval as they read the touching story of the successful freedman voluntarily re-enslaving himself from a sense of duty to the child of a master he adored. Even yet the story lingers about the purlieus of the capital city of the Republic, of the true-hearted but infirm old slave who, freed from bondage by the event of war, brought his master's orphaned and impoverished daughter in his arms to the metropolis, and devoted his few years of freedom to her reinstatement in wealth and luxury.

Curiously enough, his own race did not seem to manifest as much enthusiasm in regard to the dead man as the white people thought they should. There were some who spoke disapprovingly of the application of his wealth to secure luxury to his master's child instead of using a portion of it to uplift his own race; and some who even referred disparagingly to the woman who would accept such a munificent bequest, while the kinsmen or at least the fellow-servants of the donor endured the poverty and ignorance which was their only inheritance from Christian slavery. Of course, this only showed how incapable the

race were, as a whole, of appreciating the really exalted character of the deceased.

It was a notable burial! The Christmas decorations on the church wall yet heralded to the world the recently amended angel-greeting of the "new version,"—a greeting so much sweeter and more consoling than the old one:

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men,—*with whom He is well pleased!*"

If the Divine was "well-pleased" with men in the days when Herod, the terrible, sought the Young Child's life,—how rapturous must be His approval of the most respectable society of the American metropolis, met to do honor to a humble hero of a despised race, who lived and died only to bless a child of that people to whom He has given "glory and honor and dominion," because they are white! To whom He has committed the interpretation of His will and the redemption of all other people's! Who are His petted children, to whom He has granted the right to subordinate and control all other races, and if need be to deport or destroy them "in order to save Christian civilization from impending peril"!

So, thousands looked upon the dark face as it lay in the costly casket, the great silver-

bowed glasses hiding the unseeing eyes, and the thin lips smiling grimly and triumphantly up at the arched and decorated ceiling of the great church whose worshipers would have felt it almost contaminated by his presence while alive. They buried him as a hero because he had given wealth to the child of another, the daughter of a "superior race." If they had known how he had immolated himself to lift his own progeny from shame to honor,—they would have spat upon his bier! The country's officials came gladly to do honor to one who had devoted himself to the child of an enemy, who died in striking at the Nation's heart. They would have jeered as the hearse went by if they had known that the maimed and crippled form had once fought for Liberty and Union,—and that the still heart loved above all things, save the child who dared not even weep upon his bier, the flag his courage had saved from dishonor.

The misjudged hero sleeps in an honored tomb! A shaft of black granite rises above his grave,—his soldier-name is inscribed upon it,—the name he loved because he had created and honored it. The flag for which he had fought looks approvingly down from the white dome of the Capitol. The wandering pilgrim listens to the oft-told tale of his devotion, and flushes

with admiration as his lips frame the tribute,—
“A Hero!” How they would mock and spurn
the dead, if the true record of his heroism were
told! It is a grand thing for a slave to be
true to a master,—but to have served Liberty,
to have lived and fought in starless night to
save one loved one from degradation,—ah, me!
how terrible would be the burst of wrath if the
black pillar should reveal the fraud and tell
the truth of him who molders beneath it!
And his sacrifice,—did it avail anything to
those he loved?

XXVIII.

PENALTIES.

“WELL, I have found her.”

It was Mr. Stearns who spoke. The autumn glow had come upon the Virginia hills. The poke-berries were ripe in the neglected lot on Meridian Hill. The breeze came coolly up the Potomac, but the sun still glared down upon the pitchy pavements and made the shadows of the awnings grateful. The young man sat confident and triumphant before the desk of Mr. Phelps.

“Miss Collins-Smith, I mean.”

“So I suppose,” said the lawyer quietly, taking the corner of his under lip between his teeth and frowning as he spoke.

“Yes: you wouldn’t tell me where she was; so I set myself to hunt her up. The world is too small for such a woman to hide in, now.”

“Well?”

“I found her; laid siege to her heart in due form, and a fortnight ago demanded a surrender, in due form.”

"You asked her in marriage?"

"That's about the size of it,—'Old Style,' that is."

"What did she say?"

"Claimed it was a surprise, of course; and to tell the truth looked as if one might have knocked her down with a feather; but stood me off stoutly,—wouldn't give me a kiss or even a word of encouragement,—though one could see she was hard hit,—but sent me to you."

"To me?" asked the lawyer, starting uneasily.

"Yes; gave me this note, and told me that after I had read what you would show me, if I chose to renew my proposal she would be ready to give me an answer."

He handed out a thin, square envelope as he spoke. The lawyer picked up a quaint cornelian paper-cutter which lay upon the desk, and opened it. When he had read the note it contained, he went to a safe and took out a red-covered book, which he placed upon a small stand by the window.

"You are to read that," he said gravely as he returned to the desk. "It will not take you long, but I will turn the key in the door of the clerk's room and spring the latch as I go out, so you will not be disturbed. You must

excuse me; I have to be in court this morning." He took up his hat as he spoke.

"What is it?" asked the young man in a tone of annoyance. "A family history? It don't matter though: I am too much in love to mind what her family has been. If you are not back before twelve, you will miss me. I am going to catch to-morrow's steamer, and you may look for my wedding cards in a month. I shall grant no quarter when I summon her again."

The lawyer made no answer. The young man threw his hat and stick impatiently upon the table and lounged over to the stand beside the window.

"Well, good-by," said the lawyer, as he started out.

The drone of conversation and the rumbling of vehicles over the softened concrete came up through the window as the young man sat down to the task love had enjoined upon him.

When, an hour later, the lawyer let himself in with the latch-key, he smiled grimly to find no one within, and the red-covered book lying closed upon the stand.

The Christmas-time had come and gone, since the bootblack of the Best House had passed over to the majority. His memory was

already a tradition. The holy season was again near at hand when Mr. Stearns sought once more the lawyer's office. There had been a great deal of change in the meantime,—the change which makes Washington the great sand-beach of American life, not its center as other capitals are, but the shore on which the waves of Oblivion break. The name upon the door was "Phelps & Wolcott" now; but the same calm-faced man sat at the desk. The reporter had prospered, too: he was a city editor now, and bade fair to become a luminary in his profession. He seemed much annoyed at something, and held a newspaper in his hand. The greeting which passed between the two was somewhat constrained.

"Have you seen that?" asked the young man, laying the newspaper on the other's desk and pointing to a paragraph as he spoke.

The lawyer read the following:

"A very interesting ceremony will take place in this city on Christmas Eve. It is understood that a wealthy young lady, formerly of Washington, will at that time take the vows of a noviciate of the order of 'Sisters of Mercy,' devoting herself especially to work among the colored people. Her fortune, which is said to be a large one, has already been placed in the hands of trustees to be used for advancing the interests of that race. Her life

is believed to be full of mystery and romance, but just what the reasons are which induce a young, lovely, and accomplished lady to take this step, it seems almost impossible to conceive. It is rumored that the postulate will take the name of 'Sister Pactola.'"

When he had concluded its perusal, he looked quietly up at the young man's flushed face.

"You knew about it?" asked the editor, hotly.

The lawyer bowed gravely.

"It is——?"

The lawyer bowed again.

"And you advised it, I suppose?" The young man spoke bitterly.

"My advice was not asked."

"Why didn't you stop it—why don't you stop it now?"

His companion smiled sadly, but made no answer.

"It ought to be done; it shall be done! She is throwing herself away! Where is her brother?"

No answer was given to the imperious inquiry.

"Oh, I will find out! You need not think you can balk me. You would not tell me

where she was hidden; but I found her!" The young man spoke very confidently.

"Did any good result?" asked the lawyer, gravely.

The younger man's face flushed.

"Of course,—I couldn't—if it had not been for my mother—perhaps—"

"Do not excuse yourself," interrupted the lawyer, commiseratingly. "You are only one of many—very many—who dare not forget."

"But her brother,—he might—I am sure I could make him interfere! I will too. If you will not tell me where he is, I will find him."

"Is not one victim enough?" asked the other, impressively. "Would it not be better to leave him to work out his own destiny!"

"But why does she do it—what reason does she give?"

"She says," replied the lawyer gravely, "that she sees no other way to avoid either deception or the confession of inferiority."

"But she has no right to bury herself—one with her gifts! Did you tell her that?"

"I had no right to do so."

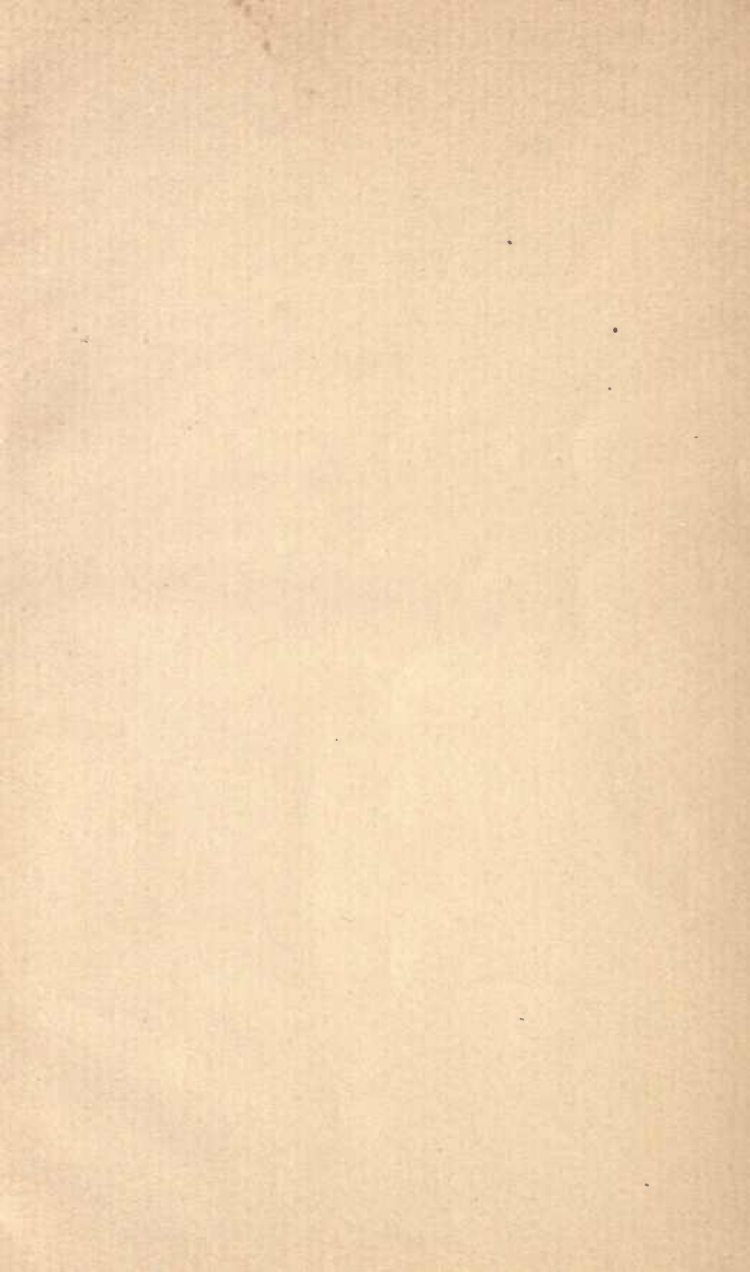
"Why not?"

"I could not deny the truth of her words."

"My God!" exclaimed the young man,

starting to his feet, and staggering blindly toward the door. He forgot the accustomed parting words, and the lawyer after a moment's pause, and a long-drawn sigh, went on with his work. But before him—across the open page—floated often the fateful words, "Sister Pactola."

THE END.





UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 041 846 7

